

# Writing an Article Review

Prepared by Ahmar Mahboob and Sally Humphrey  
Department of Linguistics. University of Sydney

This document is written to give students advice on how to write an article review and is composed of four parts:

**Part 1** describes the purpose of an article review and gives examples of how the Introduction, Body and Conclusion stages function to achieve that purpose.

**Part 2** focusses on how information is organised analytically in the Body stage of the article review and describes the typical criteria for evaluating aspects of the article.

**Part 3** outlines some useful language resources for making evaluations and achieving an academic style in article reviews.

**Part 4** provides some steps for writing the review, including advice on reading critically.

## Part 1. Purpose and Structure of an Article review

### ***What is an article review and why do we write it?***

An article review is a 'critical' piece of writing which serves three important purposes:

- a) to provide a summary of the article
- b) to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the article
- c) to evaluate the article in relation to your knowledge about the topic

Article reviews are built into your course requirements for the following reasons:

- To introduce you to the research literature in your area of studies
- To help you to develop critical reading strategies
- To help you to develop academic writing skills

### ***Structure of an article review***

The Introduction, Body and Conclusion stages of Article reviews work in particular ways to achieve the three purposes outlined above. In this section we will explain the important features of each stage and provide examples from successful students' texts in Sociology and related subjects.

## Introduction

### Functions:

- To introduce the article and provide the name of the author and date of publication (Bibliographic citation)
- To provide a brief summary of the content and goals of the article

This Introduction from an article review in Educational Sociology demonstrates these functions. The references to the goals of the original article are highlighted.

Functional elements	Article Review Introduction
Citation (in-text referencing)	Lingard and Rizvi (1998), in their article 'Globalisation and the Fear of Homogenisation in Education', <b>present a strong case against the view</b> that globalisation has resulted in a homogenised society with few choices available to participants on a local or national level. In so doing
Summary of article <b>goals</b> and content	<b>they provide an overview</b> of the complex relationships involved in and emanating from the globalisation process and <b>challenge fears</b> expressed in world systems theories and more superficial analyses.

## Body (Review)

The Body of an article review is the most important stage and is often referred to as the Review stage.

### Functions:

- To briefly **summarise** important aspects of the article to show that you understand them
- To **evaluate** these aspects to show that you can relate them critically to other knowledge relevant to the course you are studying.

Examples of some different ways of organising the summary/evaluations within the review and of developing criteria for evaluation are provided in Part 3.

## Conclusion

The conclusion of your article review ties your main points together in a general way.

### Functions:

- To **summarise** points evaluated in review stage
- To **provide** an overall critical assessment of the article
- To **recommend** further areas of research (optional)

The following example from the article review shown above demonstrates these functions

Functional elements	Article Review Conclusion
Summary of points evaluated in review stage	In conclusion, Lingard and Rizvi's article achieves a great deal in framing and contextualising the debate of globalisation and the fear of globalisation in education. It is also successful in drawing together research and analysis from a range of disciplines, sites and contexts. However, the reach of their arguments is limited by the level of abstraction and by the lack of focus on issues related to education.
Overall critical assessment	While the authors do supply evidence to challenge popular myths of homogenisation and to support their argument that the nation state remains important, ultimately they do not supply enough evidence from rich and poor nations and communities to support their argument that 'the local and the national remain the most significant sites of cultural production and political struggle' (63)

## Part 2: Organising information and evaluating in the Body

### *Organising information*

It is expected that the information within the body of the article review is organised analytically. Analysis means that you must:

- select three or four particular aspects of the original article to include in your review rather than trying to summarise the entire article. It is important to select those aspects which are most important or relevant to your field of study and that allow you to bring in additional knowledge from other sources. An aspect may be a particular finding, argument or conclusion in the article or some aspect of the methodology, style or context which is important. The summary within the conclusion of the article review shown above outlines the three aspects of the article selected by the student writer. She has evaluated:
  1. the way the authors have framed and contextualised the debate of globalisation and the fear of globalisation in education.
  2. the way the authors have drawn together research and analysis from a range of disciplines, sites and contexts.
  3. the reach of the authors' arguments
- Integrate the summary and evaluations of each aspect within paragraphs. Summaries are typically very brief and function to orient the reader to the evaluation to follow. Evaluations need to be based on criteria which are relevant to the course you are studying.

## ***Evaluating within the Body of an Article Review***

There are two main ways that arguments and findings can be evaluated:

### **1. Relevance to your field of enquiry.**

Here you need to relate the arguments and findings in the article to the issues of concern in the course you are studying. In the following example, a student of has related an argument made by the linguist David Crystal (date) to concerns about equity which have been a focus of her Education and Society course.

<i>summary of aspect (argument)</i> →	<i>Crystal's second argument is that a global language such as English would bring benefits in the academic domain. This argument is particularly relevant to educators concerned with issues of social justice. Crystal details of the role of English in disseminating research through international conferences and academic papers, however, he acknowledges that such benefits can only come if adequate resources are made available for education. For poorer nations without such resources, a privileging of English may lead to further marginalisation from the mainstream academic community.</i>
evaluation (of → relevance to education)	

### **2. Evidence.**

Here you need to evaluate the argument or finding according to how well it is supported i) within the article and ii) by other researchers in your field. The first example from a review of an article of youth participation, summarises and evaluates findings within one article according to the findings of other social researchers.

<i>summary of aspect (argument)</i> →	<i>Vromen's investigation identified five forms of youth participation in political action, most of which involved communal action or discourse. While most of these forms are supported by other social researchers (eg. Harris et al 2007, Wyn &amp; White 2004), the inclusion of 'discussion of political issues' is problematic in light of other research findings. Wissman (2007), in fact, provides evidence of young people being restricted in their social engagement because the discussions they had amongst themselves were not given space in public arenas such as school assemblies. Similarly, Ewins (2004:102) suggests that feelings of alienation in young people may be linked to 'lack of effective outlets for participation in media and public life' and argues that discussion of political issues needs to be seen as 'pre-political' activity.</i>
evaluation → (according to evidence from other researchers)	

The second example, from an article review in the same field, evaluates findings according to the (lack of) evidence provided in the article.

<p>summary of aspect (argument) →</p> <p>evaluation (according to evidence from other researchers) →</p>	<p><i>Maddison &amp; Scalmer (2006:38) recognise the importance of formal education in developing the skills needed by young people in their political participation. However, they fail to address the question of how such skills may be incorporated into the current school curriculum. While such skills are often included in elective subjects within the social sciences, they are not always included in 'core' subjects such as English and are therefore not available to all young people.</i></p>
--	--

## Part 3: Language Resources

### *Language resources for making evaluations*

There are a number of language resources which found in successful article reviews. Some key resources are:

#### **Comparison and concession**

A good way of evaluating is to compare aspects of the article to those from other articles which are considered authoritative in your course. While quoting can be powerful, it is more common to paraphrase and summarise sources. However, in all cases, it is important to provide references to the sources. For example:

Similarly, Ewins (2004:102) suggests that....

While most of these forms are supported by other social researchers (eg. Harris et al 2007, Wyn & White 2004), ....

the use of **concession** to bring in two 'sides' of an argument but to make one side seem more powerful. Conjunctions such as 'While', 'Although' and 'However' are useful resources for making resources in academic writing. In the following example, the writer 'concedes' a positive evaluation of the article first and then turns the evaluation around to make a powerful negative evaluation.

While most of these forms are supported by other social researchers (eg. Harris et al 2007, Wyn & White 2004), the inclusion of 'discussion of political issues' is problematic in light of other research findings

#### **Tempering opinions and evaluations.**

It is important to remember that, although your research and knowledge give you the authority to present opinions and judgements about the article, these opinions need to be supported by sources which are considered authorities in your field. Opinions which are introduced by expressions such as 'Everyone knows' or 'It is obvious that..' are not appropriate expressions for students to use because they assume that the reader already agrees with your opinion and 'close down' or contract the space for other opinions too sharply. Your job is to convince the reader to agree with you through the arguments and evidence you provide. Using more 'open' modal verbs (possible, may, could) and other modal and grading

expressions (eg. always, often, limited, to some extent, suggests, a great deal) help to temper the evaluations so that they do not seem overly confronting or authoritative.

### **Evaluative vocabulary**

Evaluative vocabulary needs to focus on objective criteria such as relevance, importance, significance and validity rather than personal tastes or feelings.

### ***Using a formal Academic style of language***

The following more general aspects of language use will help you to present your information in the formal style of writing expected by students.

### **Background personal feelings and experience.**

While you are encouraged to form your own assessment of the article you are reviewing, this assessment needs to be formed through your subject knowledge rather than from your personal experience. For this reason, student writers should not use the 'I' voice or to refer to their personal experience or feelings. Formal style also means that students need to avoid contractions (eg. won't, can't), abbreviations (eg. TV) and colloquial expressions.

### **Linking information between sentences and paragraphs**

Importantly, conjunctions such as 'and', 'but' and 'so' should only be used to link information inside a sentence not between sentences. That means these conjunctions should never be at the beginning of the sentence in academic writing. Conjunctions such as Moreover, However and Therefore are used for linking information between sentences or paragraphs.

### **Tense**

Reviews are generally written in the 'timeless' simple present. This is because we consider that the author's points continue to be available to the reader in the text. The author has not finished talking!

## **Part 4: Steps in writing an article review**

In order to write your article review you should consider the following steps:

a) first read the article quickly to develop a general idea of the article. Concentrate on the introduction and conclusion as well as the headings and the first sentences of each paragraph (topic sentences). Academic articles provide a great deal of information in these places to give the reader an orientation or a map of the main ideas. Keep the following questions in mind as you read the article for the first time.

- what is the author's purpose (eg. to report on research, to argue a case, to discuss sides of an issue)

- what is the author's position on the topic? (eg, do they support a particular view? will they challenge others' views? are they trying to evaluate a range of views? are they reporting in an objective way?)
- What are the main points or findings included
- How is the article organised? (ie according to different arguments, according to strengths and weaknesses, according to different findings or parts of the topic)

b) Now read the article again more carefully and ask yourself questions such as these:

- What are the main points?
- Are the arguments convincing? What makes them convincing? (eg. evidence, explanation, examples)
- What kind of evidence is used? (eg. authoritative sources, unsources material from the popular media or internet, anecdotal evidence, personal experience)
- Is the article cohesive? Do the various points fit together and link back to support the main position?
- Did the authors make clear the methods they used to research the topic? Were the methods adequate and valid?
- What conclusions or recommendations are made? do these relate to the arguments and findings presented in the article?

c) Relate the points in the article to points in other readings from your course or to knowledge you have gained through your course and academic studies. Find references to sources which agree or disagree with particular arguments or findings. This will support you in making positive or negative evaluations of the article.

d) select the aspects of the article which you will include in your article review. These should be the most important aspects but also those which are most relevant to your course and which will best show your understanding of the topic. make an outline of your review following the suggested structure shown above.

e) draft your article review. In the first draft focus on communicating your ideas and don't worry about the editing at this stage

f). Once you have completed the draft, go back and edit it. Make sure that you have included all the relevant information, that you have clearly signalled the organisation of the text to your reader through topic sentences. Check that you have used academic style and that you have used correct grammatical constructions (eg tense, subject verb agreement).