A critical review requires you to analyse an academic text e.g. an article, a report, an essay or a book. You are asked to make judgements, positive or negative, about the text using various criteria. The information and knowledge in the text need to be evaluated, and the criteria that should be used can vary depending on your discipline. This means that management, sociology, information technology, or literature may use different criteria. All critical reviews, however, involve two main tasks: summary and evaluation. Read your assignment instructions carefully to find out what proportion is required for each, and whether these should be presented as separate sections or as a combined text.

**Summary/ Description**
A description of the text:

- The topic, or the main question it proposes to answer.
- Why does the author think the question(s) is important?
- The arguments (answers with reasons) that it makes.
- The structure of the text or the method used to answer the question.
- The evidence used to support answers.
- The conclusions reached in the text.
- Any further questions raised, but not answered in the text.

These points should be summative and text-based, not judgemental unless combined with the critique. Be careful not to give too much detail, especially in a short review.

**Evaluation/ Judgment/ Critique**
YOUR judgement about the quality or value of the text (for other researchers, or to practitioners in the field, or to students).

An evaluation of the text using criteria appropriate to your discipline.

When evaluating the text you could answer some of the following questions. The underlined terms are possible criteria:

- Is the question the text tries to answer relevant, interesting, new, useful?
- Who will find the text useful? Why?
- Does the text give new answers or interpretations to an old question?
- Is the text detailed, or brief? Simple or complex?
- Is the evidence presented to support the answer extensive? Strong? Weak? Relevant? Persuasive? Contradictory?
- Are the conclusions reached final, limited, qualified or preliminary?
Process of writing a critical review

1. Skim read the text – note the main question or questions the text tries to answer and the main answers it gives.

2. Think of evaluation criteria. Talk about the text and criteria with classmates.

3. Read the text again and note the important points in detail such as the subject, question, arguments and/or evidence, and conclusions made, and your evaluation using your criteria.

4. Read related texts, note differences or similarities and explain these.

5. Outline critical review, matching points of description with evaluation criteria.


Structure of a critical review

Title
Title: usually looks like an entry in a bibliography.

Introduction

Leadership is different from management and this article provides a clear, cogent explanation of the difference. (From Coyle 2000)

Introduction should contain:
- A general overview of the topic or question(s) of the text, including the importance of the topic or question.
- Your evaluation of the merits of the text, with brief reasons.
- An explanation of how the critical review will be organised.

Body paragraphs

1. Summary / description of original (may be integrated or separate).

Kotter examines the difference between leadership and management across three major sets of tasks: setting direction versus planning and budgeting; aligning people versus organisation and staffing; and motivating versus controlling and problem solving. (Adapted from Coyle 2000)

2. Evaluation of the text.

Kotter’s insights, tools, and ideas for action are relevant but the need for more insight is great. [You should explain why in more detail] (From Coyle 2000)

You may not always feel that you are able to judge whether the argument in a text is correct or not. It may be useful to explain first how the arguments given in the same text are the same, or different from, arguments given in other texts on the same topic. Then, if they are different, explain which argument you find more convincing and why.

Like Mintzberg, Kotter concludes that the jobs of a manager and a leader are not filled with neatly segmented tasks such as planning or organising. (From Gibson 1999)

You may need to read widely about a topic to support your judgments.

Conclusion

Critical reviews don't always need a conclusion so you must decide whether to include one or not. If you think a conclusion is necessary then you should summarise your arguments on your overall view of the text.

In sum, this is some of Kotter’s best work. It is a good resource for the practising manager who wants a quick and reliable, even practical source of information on what constitutes good leadership today. (Adapted from Gibson 1999)