

It is common across disciplines to write a **critical response**, sometimes called a **critique** or a **review**. In such an assignment, you may be asked to critically evaluate a method, a technique or practice, a theory or argument, a text, or a piece of research. A critical response is an evaluative judgement which is based on your academic understanding of the topic and common academic **norms** and principles, rather than your unsupported personal opinion. It might address strengths and weaknesses of precision (*accurately measures*), extent (*does not fully explain*), consistency (*contradictory results*), or usefulness (*an effective method*).

This module covers:

- Recognizing, responding to, and expressing evaluation
- Writing a critical response to a text

TASK 1 Recognizing types of evaluation

1 Work in pairs. Read extracts A–E from student writing, which all contain evaluation. For each extract, decide:

- **Discipline:** Which discipline is the student studying?
- **Topic:** What topic is being discussed? (e.g. a technique, a method, a theory, an argument)
- **Stance:** What is the writer's stance? (e.g. supportive, critical, expressing limitations)

A **Whilst** both tools have **significant uses** in the design process, they **remain a guide**, and their findings **should not be treated as absolute**. All computational simulation models **have to make assumptions** that are **not entirely consistent with** the real world.

B The use of non-synthetic pesticides should be a last resort, because it can impact beneficial insects and have a significant effect on the environment. This is **not fully in line with** the principles of organic farming.

C Proponents of section 34 would argue that an innocent defendant will have nothing to hide, and would suffer no ill effects from having conversations with his legal advisor examined. This **does not account for** the multitude of reasons an innocent defendant might have for not wanting the contents of a confidential dialogue revealed in open court.

D By using this specific case study, the author puts forward **a useful model** that can **easily be applied to** other businesses.

E Because the concept of decommodification is based on labour markets, women **can only really** be included in Esping-Anderson's analysis if they are in formal employment. Women's needs, **however**, in terms of state support, **are most likely to be** based around unequal household and caring responsibilities.

2 Focus on the language in bold in extracts A–E. In each extract, which category 1–5 below is the writer evaluating?

Example: *In Text A, the writer is evaluating **extent** (Whilst ... remain a guide) and **consistency** (not entirely consistent).*

- 1 precision (how accurate something is)
- 2 extent (the degree to which something is true)
- 3 basis (how strong the basis for something is)
- 4 consistency (how regular and reliable something is)
- 5 usefulness (how practical and workable something is)

3 Choose the best category in 2 for the evaluative words and phrases in the list.

assumption compatible comprehensive conjecture consistent with
effective error exactly limited presuppose reliability sufficient

Example: assumption = category 3 – connected to the *basis* of something. If you make an assumption, this means that the basis is not certain, but assumed.

4 Which words in 3 are largely used for a) negative, b) positive evaluation?

How can their opposites be expressed?

Example: compatible – largely positive opposite – incompatible / not compatible

TASK 2 Identifying and responding to a writer's evaluation

1 Text 1 describes reasons why it can be difficult to change people's eating habits.

Read the first paragraph and write a sentence paraphrasing each reason 1–5.

Example: 1 *There are many different influences on people's ideas about food: society, family, personal experience, the media.*

Food likes and their relative importance in human eating behavior: review and preliminary suggestions for health promotion

TEXT 1

1 **Although** many people are interested in developing healthier eating patterns, nutritional interventions **do not always succeed in** bringing about behavioral change. The difficulty of changing eating habits has been related to ¹ the multiple roots of people's ideas about food (e.g. the society's 'food ideology', the family environment, personal experience and the media), ² conflicts between intrinsic and extrinsic values (i.e. liking on the short term and health consequences on the long term) characterizing dietary advice, ³ the gradual development (instead of immediate appearance) of diet-related health problems, ⁴ the requirement of long-term changes in habitual food intake for risk reduction and disease prevention through nutritional means, and ⁵ the less than obvious physical feedback of some dietary changes (Glanz & Mullis, 1988; Wardle, 1993; Wardle & Solomons, 1994).

2 Basically, two broad intervention strategies exist to alter eating behavior. One strategy focuses on individual problem awareness and personal motivation and skills, the other on providing context stimuli intended to direct food choice. **The effectiveness of** these programmes **can be questioned**. Because food (dis)likes **appear of major importance** to eating behavior and learning mechanisms are responsible for their development and change, **effectiveness of** interventions **may be increased by** special emphasis on these two elements.

SOURCE: Eertmans, A., Baeyens, F., & Van den Bergh, O. (2001). Food likes and their relative importance in human eating behavior: review and preliminary suggestions for health promotion. *Health Education Research*, 16(4): 443-456.

2 Read paragraph 2, which reviews health promotion strategies. Note which *two* of the following are existing strategies for promoting healthy eating, according to the text.

- a raising individual awareness about healthy eating
- b providing direct encouragement for people to opt for healthy food
- c recognizing that individual food preferences are crucial to eating behaviour

3 Note down examples of healthy eating campaigns that use the techniques mentioned in the text. (Think about your experience / your country / another country.)

4 Look at the first and last sentences (highlighted) in Text 1, especially the evaluative language in bold. Decide the main focus of the writers' evaluation.

- a the precision of the health promotion strategies c the consistency of the strategies
- b the usefulness of the strategies

5 Work in pairs.

- 1 Compare your answers to 1–4 and summarize in your own words why the authors believe that current strategies are ineffective.
- 2 To what extent do you agree with this evaluation? Refer to any campaigns you noted in 3.

Evaluation (3) Confident and tentative language

You may express evaluative comments **confidently**, especially those based on clear evidence:

*Current techniques **do not account for** sampling variability.*

*The data shows that interventions **were not sufficient** to overcome negative effects.*

However, you will often want to express your degree of confidence more **tentatively**, using hedging language so that you don't over-generalize and leave yourself open to counter-criticism.

- How sure am I that this is true or correct? Use *perhaps, possibly, potentially, can / may / might, appear / seem to*, etc.:

*Because food (dis)likes **appear** of major importance to eating behavior ... effectiveness of interventions **may be increased by** ...*

*Stem cell therapy offers a **potentially** powerful treatment for inherited disorders.*

- To what extent is this true? Use *largely, partially, mostly, to a (limited / certain) extent*, etc.:

***To some extent**, therefore, this finding contradicts the main hypothesis.*

- Is this always true in every case? Use *sometimes, often, generally, tend to*, etc.:

*Nutritional interventions **do not always succeed in** bringing about behavioral change.*

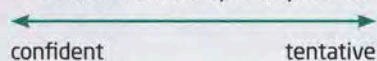
As well as modals and adverbials, vocabulary choice can reflect your degree of confidence. Compare:

*The effectiveness of these programmes ... **can be questioned / is sometimes disputed / has been heavily criticized.***

TASK 3 Expressing evaluation confidently and tentatively

- 1 Order each set of words 1–6 from most confident to most tentative.

Example: *attack, criticize, dispute, question*



- aid, contribute to, enable, ensure (verbs)
 - alter, modify, revolutionize, transform (verbs)
 - indicate, prove, show, suggest (verbs)
 - beneficial, desirable, invaluable, useful (adjectives)
 - adverse, detrimental, devastating, harmful (adjectives)
 - hostility, opposition, reservation, resistance (nouns)
- 2 For each set, write a sentence in which you can substitute two words in the set.
Example: *This important publication **aids / contributes to** our understanding of the topic.*
- 3 Read the two student texts, A and B, evaluating healthy eating campaigns. For each text, identify:
- the writer's stance
 - evaluative language
 - confident or tentative evaluation.

A The process of school food reform in the UK was dramatically accelerated by the 2005 campaign by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver to encourage healthy eating among children by ensuring that only healthy lunches were served in school canteens. Despite some initial resistance from children and some parents, these reforms have undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the promotion of healthy eating habits from an early age, and thanks to support from government and education authorities, the momentum of the initial campaign has been sustained.

B The '5-a-day' programme, aimed at encouraging greater consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables, which has operated in various forms across the world, may have raised public awareness of the benefits of healthy eating. However, the effectiveness of this message seems to be contradicted by other emerging trends in eating habits. With a growing proportion of the food we consume now coming from pre-prepared and away-from-home sources such as take-aways, rather than being cooked at home from fresh ingredients, many people apparently have limited control over their intake of fresh vegetables. Fried potatoes, for example, account for 35% of away-from-home vegetable consumption (Stewart & Blisard, 2008).

- 4 Write a short paragraph similar to the student texts in 3, describing and evaluating a healthy eating campaign (or other health promotion initiative) that you are familiar with. Make sure:
 - you include appropriate evaluative language
 - you use confident or tentative language that reflects your stance.
- 5 Work in pairs and exchange texts. Identify your partner's use of evaluative language and stance, and decide how clearly expressed these are.

TASK 4 Responding critically to a text

- 1 Work in groups. You are going to read Text 2, about variation in individual food preferences, i.e. foods that different people like or dislike. Discuss how the following factors might influence people's food preferences.

advertising biological factors cultural background exposure to foods family genetic factors health education personal experience social transmission taste

Example: *Although health education might influence your food choices to some extent, it is unlikely to fundamentally change which foods you like and dislike.*

- 2 Quickly read Text 2 and identify which three of the factors in 1 are mentioned.

TEXT 2

One of the strongest environmental influences on food preference is taste. This can affect an individual's likes and dislikes from the earliest stages of life; the maternal diet can influence the child *in utero*. In a series of studies at the Monell Chemical Senses Center, USA, Julie Mennella and her colleagues demonstrated this phenomenon by assigning pregnant women who were planning to breastfeed to one of three groups. Women were asked to drink carrot juice regularly either in the last trimester of pregnancy, while breastfeeding, or not at all. Babies born to the mothers in either of the carrot juice groups had less negative responses to carrots during weaning, and were perceived to like them more by their mothers than babies of mothers in the control group (Mennella *et al.*, 2001). Similar results have been documented in rats, dogs, sheep, rabbits and piglets.

Evidence for the ability of exposure to promote liking for certain foods has been building over the past three decades. Surveys in children of food consumption and preferences have linked early taste experiences to subsequent food acceptance (Cooke *et al.*, 2004), which is consistent with an exposure effect. Experimental studies have also shown that exposure increases liking and acceptance in animals, children (Sullivan & Birch, 1990) and adults (Pliner *et al.*, 1993). One study that compared children's acceptance of three varieties of a new food - plain, salted or sugared tofu - showed that children preferred whichever variety they had been exposed to earlier (Sullivan & Birch, 1990).

These findings have been replicated in the outside world. In one study, school children were randomly divided into three groups: exposure to the food (red pepper), exposure plus reward, or no exposure. After eight days, the children exposed to red pepper had significantly increased their liking and intake of it, compared with the control group (Wardle *et al.*, 2003b). The same effects were achieved when the intervention was delivered by mothers who had been taught exposure feeding techniques. When offered a vegetable that they had initially disliked, children in the experimental group showed a greater increase in liking and intake after 14 days than those in the control groups, who had received no treatment or had been given leaflets about healthy eating (Wardle *et al.*, 2003a).

In animals, food preferences are thought to be socially transmitted: the sight of members of their own species eating, or even the smell of food on their breath can encourage consumption. In one study, lambs were exposed to three treatments: they ate a new food with their mother, observed her doing so but were unable to eat it themselves, or the mother ate the food out of their sight. Lambs that were with their mother while she was eating showed a stronger preference for the food in a subsequent test, even if they had not eaten the food themselves (Saint-Dizier *et al.*, 2007).

These modelling effects have also been observed in humans. In one study, children drank different flavours of new drinks while watching a video of a model expressing a like or dislike of the same drink (Baeyens *et al.*, 1996). The children were found to prefer the flavour that the model had liked. This suggests that in the home, if parents, or better still peers, show that they like a food, the child will be more inclined to taste and accept it.

3 Read Text 2 again in detail. Complete the table with information about the three factors influencing food preference.

	Factor	Evidence from studies	Foods tested in studies
1	taste	Mennella <i>et al.</i> , 2001	carrot juice
2			tofu red pepper
3		Saint-Dizier <i>et al.</i> , 2007	

4 Work in groups. Evaluate the main ideas put forward in Text 2.

- 1 Evaluate the **accuracy** and **relevance** of the seven studies in relation to the points made in the text.
- 2 Assess the extent to which the conclusions drawn from the studies can be **applied** more generally.
- 3 Assess the implications of the findings and how **useful** they are.

TASK 5 Writing a critical response to a text

1 Write a critical response to Text 2. Write one or two paragraphs. Follow the guidelines below.

Guidelines for writing a critical response

- 1 Decide on your overall stance: supporting, critical, or a mix of the two.
- 2 Assume that your audience has not read the original text; briefly summarize the topic and main points from the text before you add your evaluative comments.
- 3 Refer to the text where necessary, e.g. *Wardle & Cooke (2010) argue that ...*
- 4 Include the points you most agree with from the group discussion in Task 4.4.
- 5 Choose only the points you think are the most interesting or significant; you do not need to include all the details in the source text.
- 6 Finish with a brief overall evaluative comment on the whole text.

2 When you have finished, use Checklist M to evaluate your writing. Edit your text in the light of your answers.

CHECKLIST M Evaluation criteria for a critical response

- | | |
|--|----------|
| Does your writing: | |
| 1 present a clear stance? | Yes / No |
| 2 present an organized, coherent flow of ideas? | Yes / No |
| 3 clearly but concisely explain main points from the text? | Yes / No |
| 4 link evaluative comments to the points from the text? | Yes / No |
| 5 use appropriate evaluative language? | Yes / No |
| 6 use appropriate language to express confident or tentative evaluation? | Yes / No |