

# CRITICAL THINKING IN TEACHING WRITING BOOK REVIEW

**Galuh Kirana Dwi Areni**   **Frimadhona Syafri**  
d\_areni@yahoo.com   frima\_d@yahoo.com  
Semarang State University   Semarang State University

## ABSTRACT

Critical thinking is important in university because students can have some benefits e.g. (1) achieving better marks; (2) reducing their dependency on teachers and text books; and (3) creating their knowledge. Therefore, students are supposed to be able to apply critical thinking skills to all their academic reading, writing, listening and discussing. Book Report and Review is one of the subjects taught in English Department of Unnes. Writing book reviews is not only informational, but also analytic and persuasive. In doing it, consequently, students are required to have critical thinking skills in analysing the content, format, argument, and context to argue that the book is worth reading or not. In order to display critical thinking, they need to develop skills in interpreting, analysing, reasoning, and evaluating. This presentation will focus on how to develop teaching strategies that can foster students' critical thinking in writing book reviews. It will discuss the concept of critical thinking for undergraduate students, its implementation in teaching writing book reviews, and its assessment in students' book review writing texts.

**Keywords:** *critical thinking, book review*

## INTRODUCTION

Book Report and Review is a subject taught in English Department of Unnes for 5th semester students of both educational and literature study programs which aims to develop the skill of reading a book in an attempt to compose a descriptive and critical or evaluative account of the book in an oral and written presentation. In Book Report and Review classes, we often found that students had difficulties in reviewing books critically. Instead of reviewing the books critically, they just reported them. It means that they still got confused the difference of writing Book Reports and Book Reviews.

Based on our finding, we tried to make an action research to overcome this problem. Besides explaining the theories of Book Review, we also tried to guide them with critical thinking approach. In realizing this approach, we used some cooperative strategies such as *Team-Pair-Solo* and *Round Robin Brainstorming*.

This article will describe on how to develop teaching strategies that can foster students' critical thinking in writing book reviews. It will also discuss the concept of critical thinking for undergraduate students, its implementation in teaching writing book reviews, and its assessment in students' book review writing texts.

There are some theories related to what a book review is. Although a book review, like a book report, spends some time discussing the content of the book, its main purpose is not informational, but analytic and persuasive. The writer, in analyzing the content, format, argument, and context within which the book was written, argues that the book is worth reading or not. (<http://huronuc.on.ca/Assets/website/Document/The%20Hub/Writing%20Services/2.1g%20QUICKTIPSFORWRITINGBOOKREVIEWS.pdf>)

A critical book review is a vehicle for examining and discussing issues the book itself

raises or fails to raise. One writes a critical book review for the benefit of those who might not presently have time to read the book but who nevertheless need to learn more about its basic approach should they desire to read or study it at a future time. (<http://www.sebts.edu/files/dmin/bookreview.pdf>)

First, one must understand that a critical book review is not a book report (a summary of the contents of a book). A critical book review is a vehicle for examining and discussing issues the book itself raises or fails to raise. One writes a critical book review for the benefit of those who might not presently have time to read the book but who nevertheless need to learn more about its basic approach should they desire to read or study it at a future time. The job of the book reviewer is to inform these readers concerning any merits and/or shortcomings the book may have. From information based on a well-written review, the reader may conclude that this book is either indispensable or inconsequential.

(<http://www.sebts.edu/files/dmin/bookreview.pdf>)

Based on the explanation above, we can conclude that writing a book review is different from writing a book report. In writing book reports, students only need to report and summarize what they read from book(s); they don't necessarily need to think critically in analyzing the book(s) as the goal of making book reports is only to inform the readers what the book(s) are about. On the other hand, in writing book reviews, students need to analyze critically about some issues which can make their writing informational, analytic and persuasive so that the readers not only get some information about the book(s) but also consider whether the book(s) are worth to read or not.

There are some explanation about critical thinking from several sources as follows: Critical Thinking is the kind of thinking which seeks to explore questions about existing knowledge for issues which are not clearly defined and for which there are no clear-cut answers.

([http://sydney.edu.au/stuser/documents/learning\\_centre/critical.pdf](http://sydney.edu.au/stuser/documents/learning_centre/critical.pdf))

When you are thinking critically, you are not just thinking passively and accepting everything you see and hear. You are thinking actively. You are asking questions about what you see and hear, evaluating, categorizing, and finding relationships.

<http://www.canberra.edu.au/studyskills/learning/critical>)

Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness. (<https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>)

In other words, critical thinking stimulates students to think actively and skilfully. They have to think critically to find answers of unidentified issues through academic skills such as conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, interpreting, analyzing, reasoning, generating, reflecting, exploring, or categorizing. There are a lot of academic skills that we can use in realizing critical thinking, but in our research we will focus only on four skills below from <http://www.usyd.edu.au/lc>. He states that in order to display critical thinking, students need to develop skills in:

- Interpreting: understanding the significance of data and to clarify its meaning
- Analyzing: breaking information down and recombining it in different ways
- Reasoning: creating an argument through logical steps

- Evaluating: judging the worth, credibility or strength of account

Based on (<http://www.sebts.edu/files/dmin/bookreview.pdf>), the job of the book reviewer is to inform these readers concerning any merits and/or shortcomings the book may have. From information based on a well-written review, the reader may conclude that this book is either indispensable or inconsequential. First, one must understand that a critical book review is not a book report (a summary of the contents of a book). A critical book review is a vehicle for examining and discussing issues the book itself raises or fails to raise. One writes a critical book review for the benefit of those who might not presently have time to read the book but who nevertheless need to learn more about its basic approach should they desire to read or study it at a future time. The job of the book reviewer is to inform these readers concerning any merits and/or shortcomings the book may have. From information based on a well-written review, the reader may conclude that this book is either indispensable or inconsequential.

A book review tells not only what a book is about, but also how successful it is at what it is trying to do. Professors often assign book reviews as practice in careful analytical reading. As a reviewer, you bring together the two strands of accurate, analytical reading and strong, personal response when you indicate what the book is about and what it might mean to a reader (by explaining what it meant to you). In other words, reviewers answer not only the WHAT but the SO WHAT question about a book. Thus, in writing a review, you combine the skills of describing what is on the page, analyzing how the book tried to achieve its purpose, and expressing your own reactions.

According to ([http://sydney.edu.au/stuser/documents/learning\\_centre/critical.pdf](http://sydney.edu.au/stuser/documents/learning_centre/critical.pdf)), there are some general strategies for critical writing i.e. Read critically (e.g. check validity of references used in source text); Be fair. Take into account accepted standards of judgement

used in the particular discipline or field; Use evidence taken from sources which are considered authoritative in the field; Consider viewpoints from a range of perspectives (e.g. male and female, different socio-economic and ethnic groups); Use inclusive language (e.g. non-gender specific, non-absolute terms such as 'often' and 'could' rather than 'always' and 'is').

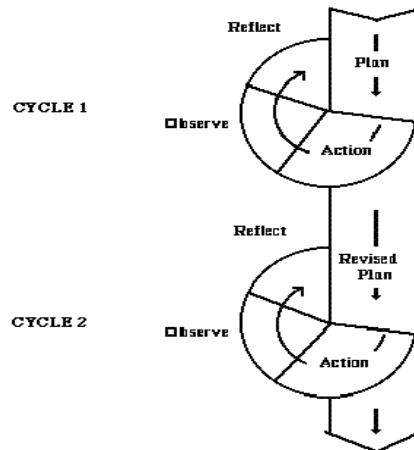
The skill of writing book reviews is necessary for university students because it trains them to analyze critically both in reading and in writing. In reading, they can explore critically the information that they need before writing reviews. In writing, they can review books critically so that they can inform the readers about the strengths and the weaknesses of the books.

In English Department of Unnes, Book Report Review class is a compulsory subject that must be taken by fifth semester students. This subject has 16 meetings and they have to make 4 (four) book reports and 4 (four) book reviews. We tried to apply critical thinking approach in our classes for some reasons – (1) they can achieve better marks; (2) they can reduce their dependency on teachers and text books; and (3) they can create their own knowledge.

## METHODOLOGY

We used a classroom action research in this study. This classroom action research is conducted in order to get solution to the problem until it can be solved. This method is a reflective process which is conducted by using necessary techniques in order to solve the problem. According to Kemmis and Taggart (Anne Burns 1999:22), the procedure of action research can be drawn in Figure 1.

The research instruments that we used in this research are critical thinking guideline (see appendix 1), rubric of assessment (see appendix 2), and observation sheet (see appendix 3).



**Figure 1. Procedure of Action Research**

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In our Book Report and Review classes, as we have mentioned before, the students were supposed to make 4 (four) book reports before the mid semester test and 4 (four) book reviews after the mid semester test. After they made their first book reviews, we found that they had difficulties in distinguishing book reports and book reviews. Therefore, we started to plan to conduct cycle 1. In the action step, we applied critical thinking approach in writing the next book reviews by giving them the guideline of critical thinking (see appendix 1) by using the following teaching strategies:

### **Pre activity**

- 1) Teacher asked students some questions, e.g. Do you like to read books? what kinds of book do you read? Have you ever read a book review?
- 2) Teacher and students discussed what Book Review is.
- 3) Teacher explained the definition of Book Review.
- 4) Teacher gave examples of Book Reviews.
- 5) Teacher and students tried to identify the

structure of Book Review examples.

### **Main activity**

- 1) Students tried to make a structure outline to make a Book Review of books that they had read.
- 2) Teacher gave some questions (guideline) to stimulate students' critical thinking in reviewing books they had read.
- 3) Students made notes of their answers based on the given questions.
- 4) Students found some examples, proofs, evidence from the books they had read to support their answer.
- 5) Students wrote their first Book Review drafts.
- 6) Students did peer assessment.
- 7) Students revised their drafts based on their peers' input.
- 8) Students presented in random their second drafts in front of the class.
- 9) Teacher gave feedback on students' presentation of Book Review.
- 10) Students revised their drafts based on the teacher's input.
- 11) Students submitted their final drafts to the teacher.

**Post activity**

- 1) Teacher and students discussed the definition, structure, and critical thinking questions in reviewing books.
- 2) Teacher asked students to review another book.

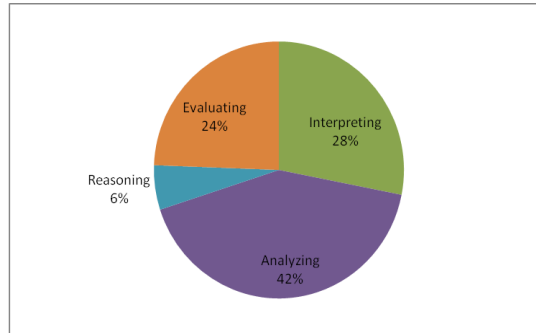
These activities were conducted in two meetings. In realizing the teaching strategies, we put the students in groups or in pairs. We made a job description, one of us as an instructor and the other as an observer. During the treatment, we observed the students' activities such as whether they used the given guideline in order, whether the guideline made them easier in making the book reviews, etc. We observed them by using observation sheet (see appendix 4).

After the students submitted their book reviews, we tried to identify them based on some types of critical thinking they used (see appendix 3). Based on our identification, we found that the students mostly used the Analyzing for 41.9%. The second frequent use of critical thinking type is Interpreting for 28.1%. Next, Evaluating were used by students for 24.4% and the least frequent use is Reasoning for 5.6%. We got the percentage by using the following formula:

The number of frequency per CT type/Total number of data x 100%

For example,

$$\text{Interpreting: } 116/413 \times 100\% = 28.1\%$$



**Figure.1 Percentage of Critical Thinking Types**

The result of this identification shows that the students were able to write book reviews by using the given critical thinking guideline. They did not get confused anymore about the differences of writing book reports and book reviews. Consequently, we decided not to conduct cycle 2. This can also be proven with the result of their assessment. The assessment was conducted by using rubric assessment that adapted from <http://www.wlac.edu/staffand>

[faculty/SLO\\_rating\\_scale/grid\\_Sp\\_09/aj\\_rubric.pdf](http://www.wlac.edu/staffand/faculty/SLO_rating_scale/grid_Sp_09/aj_rubric.pdf).

There were 24 students who took part in our research. Out of 24 students, 5 students (20.8%) got scores 86 or more, 17 students (70.8%) got 81-85, and 2 students (8.4%) got 71-80. The percentage of students' result proves that almost all students were competent in using the critical thinking to write book reviews. The complete result is shown as below:

SCORE	DATA	PERCENTAGE
A : 86<	5	20.8%
AB : 81 - 85	17	70.8%
B : 71-80	2	8.4%
BC : 66-70	-	-
C : 61-65	-	-
CD : 56-60	-	-

Based on the observation sheet, in pre activity, most students were enthusiastic in answering questions that the teacher asked related to book review because they had had the lesson of book report before. Only 1-2 students were passive in this activity. In discussing about book review, most students were still confused about the differences between book report and book review. Therefore, the students seemed enthusiastic in listening to the teacher's explanation about definition and examples of book review. After that, the students tried to identify the structure of book review examples, guided by the teacher. Most of them did it actively.

In the step of main activity, all students were enthusiastic to make structure outlines of their own book reviews. When the teacher tried to implement the critical thinking guideline, all of students were eager to use it. They were active in making notes, finding examples, proofs, evidence from the books they had read to support their answer. Next, students were enthusiastic to write their first book review drafts. After finishing writing their first book review drafts, students exchanged their drafts to their partners. They tried to give comments to their partners' drafts enthusiastically. After the students got their drafts back, they had to revise their drafts based on their partners' input.

Some of the students were asked to present their second drafts in front of the class. They had made the book reviews in good order based on the critical thinking guidelines given before. However, the teacher still needed to give some reinforcement to the students. Next, all of the students made their final drafts of book review and submitted them to the teacher.

In the post activity, most students could summarize the lesson of book review well. They could tell the definition, structure, and critical thinking questions in reviewing books.

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Critical thinking is necessary to be implemented in writing book reviews. By using critical

thinking, students can achieve better marks, reduce their dependency on their teacher and text books, and create their knowledge. In writing book reviews, they have to be able to develop skills of interpreting, analyzing, reasoning, and evaluating critically. This study offered a critical thinking guideline to be implemented in a Book Report and Review class. The result shows that the students could develop the four types of critical thinking with different percentage. The most frequent use of critical thinking type is Analyzing for 41.9%. The second frequent use of critical thinking type is Interpreting for 28.1%. Next, the third frequent use is Evaluating which were used by students for 24.4% and the least frequent use is Reasoning for 5.6%. Most of students got satisfying scores, i.e. more than 81; they were scored based on a rubric assessment that was adapted from [http://www.wlac.edu/staffandfaculty/SLO\\_rating\\_scale/grid\\_Sp\\_09/aj\\_rubric.pdf](http://www.wlac.edu/staffandfaculty/SLO_rating_scale/grid_Sp_09/aj_rubric.pdf). From the observation sheet, we could see students' enthusiasm in using the critical thinking guideline to help them writing their book reviews. Hopefully, this study can be applied in other subjects, especially those of language skills.

### REFERENCES

- Buckley, Joanne. 1995. *"Keeping Your Head: Kinds of Essay Writing" Fit to Print*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace.
- Burns, Anne. 2008. *Exploring Teaching through Action Research*. Sydney: Department of Linguistic McQuarie University.
- Mc Niff, Jean. 1988. *Action Research*. London: Macmillan Education.
- Northey, Margaret. 1993. *Making Sense*. 3rd ed. Toronto: Oxford.
- Thomson, Ashley. 1975. *How to Review a Book*. Laurentian University Library.  
<http://www.usyd.edu.au/lc>.  
<https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>

**APPENDIXES**

***Appendix 1. Critical Thinking Guidelines of Writing Book Review***

<b>Evaluation Criteria of Book Review</b>	<b>Critical Thinking</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Notes/ Examples</b>
INTRODUCTION: Title, author, publication information (publisher, year, # of pages)	interpreting	WHAT is the title of the book? WHO is the author of the book? WHAT is the publisher of the book? WHEN is the book published? HOW many pages of the book?	
A brief description of what the book is about and why you selected it	analyzing	WHAT is the book about? WHY did you select it?	
A brief description of the author's qualification;	analyzing	WHAT is the author's qualification? WHY is the author written the book?	
SUMMARY OF CONTENTS Addresses important points Includes some of the key events, dates, places, or people	analyzing	WHAT are important issues (some of the key events, dates, places) that are found in the book?	
Gives examples to illustrate key points (and attachments, if necessary)	analyzing	WHAT evidence or proofs or examples to support the issues?	
ANALYSIS The writer's style: simple/technical; persuasive/logical	analyzing	HOW does the author apply his ideas in the book?	
The organizational method (comparison/contrast; cause/effect; analogy ;persuasion through example) develop the argument or theme of the book	analyzing	WHAT is the main argument or thesis of the book? HOW is this argument developed by the author in the book?	
Evidences to support the argument (maps, charts, essay by experts, quotations, newspaper clippings	analyzing	WHAT are other theories from other authors to support the argument?	
Completeness the argument	reasoning	WHAT evidence or proofs or examples to support the argument?	
Facts and evidence that the author has neglected to consider	reasoning	WHAT facts and evidence that the author has neglected to consider?	
EVALUATION Brief summary of all weakness and strengths	evaluating	WHAT are the weakness(es) and strength(s) of the book?	
The book's overall usefulness to	evaluating	Is the book effective for certain reader?	

the audience it is intended for		WHY?	
Liked/disliked the book	evaluating	Do you like the book? WHY?	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Presents an analytical /critical evaluation of the book	evaluating	WHAT is your opinion about the book?	
Describes how the book could be improved, citing specific examples/sections	evaluating	WHAT are the advantages or disadvantages of the book? HOW the book could be improved?	

**Appendix 2. Data Analysis of Critical Thinking Implementation 1**

<b>EVALUATION CRITERIA OF BOOK REVIEW</b>	<b>CRITICAL THINKING</b>	<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>Number of Data</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
INTRODUCTION: Title, author, publication information (publisher, year, # of pages)	Interpreting	WHAT is the title of the book?	24	100%
		WHO is the author of the book?	24	100%
		WHAT is the publisher of the book?	24	100%
		WHEN is the book published?	23	95.8%
		HOW many pages of the book?	21	87.5%
A brief description of what the book is about and why you selected it	analyzing	WHAT is the book about?	18	75%
		WHY did you select it?	16	66.6%
A brief description of the author's qualification;	analyzing	WHAT is the author's qualification?	9	37.5%
		WHY is the author written the book?	5	20.8%
SUMMARY OF CONTENTS Addresses important points Includes some of the key events, dates, places, or people	analyzing	WHAT are important issues (some of the key events, dates, places) that are found in the book?	24	100%
Gives examples to illustrate key points (and attachments, if necessary)	analyzing	WHAT evidence or proofs or examples to support the issues?	19	79.2%
ANALYSIS The writer's style: simple/technical; persuasive/logical	analyzing	HOW does the author apply his ideas in the book?	21	87.5%
The organizational method (comparison/contrast; cause/effect; analogy	analyzing	WHAT is the main argument or thesis of the book?	24	100%
		HOW is this argument developed by the author in the book?	22	91.6%



;persuasion through example) develop the argument or theme of the book				
Evidences to support the argument (maps, charts, essay by experts, quotations, newspaper clippings	analyzing	WHAT are other theories from other authors to support the argument?	18	75%
Completeness the argument	reasoning	WHAT evidence or proofs or examples to support the argument?	18	75%
Facts and evidence that the author has neglected to consider	reasoning	WHAT facts and evidence that the author has neglected to consider?	5	20.8%
EVALUATION Brief summary of all weakness and strengths	evaluating	WHAT are the weakness(es) and strength(s) of the book?	23	95.8%
The book's overall usefulness to the audience it is intended for	evaluating	Is the book effective for certain reader? WHY?	24	100%
Liked/disliked the book	evaluating	Do you like the book? WHY?	6	25%
CONCLUSION Presents an analytical /critical evaluation of the book	evaluating	WHAT is your opinion about the book?	24	100%
Describes how the book could be improved, citing specific examples/section	evaluating	WHAT are the advantages or disadvantages of the book? HOW the book could be improved?	24	100%

### **Appendix 3. Data Analysis of Critical Thinking Implementation 2**

	TYPES OF CRITICAL THINKING	NUMBER OF ATA	PERCENTAGE
1.	Interpreting	116	28.1%
2.	Analyzing	173	41.9%
3.	Reasoning	23	5.6%
4.	Evaluating	101	24.4%

#### Appendix 4. Observation Sheet

Steps of Teaching	Activities	Notes
Pre activity:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teacher asked students some questions, e.g. Do you like to read books? what kinds of book do you read? Have you ever read a book review?</li> <li>2. Teacher and students discussed what Book Review is.</li> <li>3. Teacher explained the definition of Book Review.</li> <li>4. Teacher gave examples of Book Reviews.</li> <li>5. Teacher and students tried to identify the structure of Book Review examples.</li> </ol>	
Main activity:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students tried to make a structure outline to make a Book Review of books that they had read.</li> <li>2. Teacher gave some questions (guideline) to stimulate students' critical thinking in reviewing books they had read.</li> <li>3. Students made notes of their answers based on the given questions.</li> <li>4. Students found some examples, proofs, evidence from the books they had read to support their answer.</li> <li>5. Students wrote their first Book Review drafts.</li> <li>6. Students did peer assessment.</li> <li>7. Students revised their drafts based on their peers' input.</li> <li>8. Students presented in random their second drafts in front of the class.</li> <li>9. Teacher gave feedback on students' presentation of Book Review.</li> <li>10. Students revised their drafts based on the teacher's input.</li> <li>11. Students submitted their final drafts to the teacher.</li> </ol>	
Post activity:	Teacher and students discussed the definition, structure, and critical thinking questions in reviewing books.	