

MEMO: GUIDELINES FOR WRITING ARTICLE REVIEWS

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PURPOSE

- Engagement in class issues: an in-depth reading of a linguistics article can greatly enhance understanding of the issues discussed in class
- Feed into a research paper: nice purchase of a contemporary article can also feed into research activities in that it provides the necessary background, and may identify problems or 'loose ends' that can be taken up in a separate paper

FORMAT

The review should be long enough to satisfactorily complete the work outlined below, but no longer than 3 pages (single space). Do not use a cover page. It should also be type-written, and the work should be organized into the sections given below. Finally, it is usually the case that writing and re-writing a review reduces the excess verbiage and achieves a sharper focus, which can lead to higher marks.

Part 1: Overview, statement of topic and outline of issues

What is the article about? What are the principal empirical and theoretical issues discussed in the piece, and what conclusions are reached? Give a crisp summary of the article, perhaps a half a page, making sure that you include an explicit statement of the conclusions.

Part 2: Summary of arguments

In this section, summarize the principal arguments of the article, showing step-by-step how the researchers reached the conclusions stated in part 1. Be sure to mention the basic evidence and methods used to support each argument, and give one or two illustrations that depict the crucial features of the analysis. Important: Do not give a chronological summary of the paper. This almost always obscures the basic points and the logical flow of the arguments. A comprehensive summary can typically be done in a page, but be sure to cover all of the main points.

Part 3: Discussion of conclusions

In this section, also roughly a page long, discuss any open issues or problems raised by the article, perhaps even directly stated in the article. How do the main conclusions relate to the discussions in class on the topic? Are there empirical problems with the analysis, or the implications stemming from the assumptions inherent to the analysis? How does the analysis compare with other plausible alternative analyses? Engage your reader by developing one or two of the ideas discussed in the paper in this way, but do not try to cover all possible points. Establish a clear point first, using rigorous argumentation, before moving to new points.

SELECTING AN ARTICLE TO REVIEW

Since the reviews support class activities and a research paper, start with articles that are either on the syllabus or in the reference sections of those papers. The instructor can always suggest good articles to review, as can your graduate student colleagues. Also, keyword searches of PDF indexes can be very useful in finding good articles. Try to avoid papers, however, that are greater than 50 pages (though sections of monographs are fair game), or that contain an excessive amount of technical jargon, i.e., terms without explicit definitions in the piece, as these things create obstacles in the early stages of a project. Do not avoid older papers—some of the most interesting issues in linguistics were discussed in the 60s and 70s.