

TOPICS IN PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT



PROTIP #2: How to summarize and critique a reading



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Once you have read a scientific presentation -- a chapter in a book, an article in a journal, or a volume presenting research findings -- the next important step is to critique it: to compare and contrast it with other things you have read, and to develop a sense of its contribution relative to other scholars' presentations.

This step is an implied requirement in every graduate course syllabus. It is also an expectation in a paper, literature review assignment, or publication. A scholar who does not adequately and explicitly **summarize, compare/contrast, and critique the contribution** of an article s/he cites is open to the criticism of insufficient acquaintance with the scholarly literature on that topic.

So consider **RSO3C**: Some steps you might find useful to **summarize and critique** readings on a topic:

- READ:** Use the **SQ3R** technique to get the most out of your initial reading time.
- SUMMARIZE:** Write down a **summary of 25 words or less** -- the **central contribution or idea**; the reason this piece got published. Especially if you have many articles to read and review, this will help you compare and contrast.
- OUTLINE:** If the presentation is complex, **write out an outline** of the organization and major points the author presents. This can be invaluable in assessing the strong and weak points of the argument or data presentation.
- CRITIQUE:** Write -- in outline, not in detail -- **questions or criticisms** you have of this presentation. What is not clear to you? What is open to questions of logic or epistemology? To questions of interpretation or explanation?

For each of the assignments (or articles you unearth in your literature review) repeat the above steps. But as you do this, be sure you begin to explicitly **compare and contrast** with the other articles on this topic:

- COMPARE:** How is the next article similar to, or different from, the previous one -- in terms of **central idea or contribution**? How is it similar or different in terms of **epistemology, logic, interpretation, or explanation**?

CONTRAST: In comparing the articles you have read on this topic, which seem to you as superior/inferior? Which findings are better/lesser supported? What are the commonalities; what are the central contrasts?

SUMMARIZE: After you have gone through this process (**RSO3C**) for each topic on the reading list or each reference in your literature review: what is the outcome? What **major ideas** can you list that summarize these contributions to the literature, and what **criticisms** might be offered about them?