

College Academic Review Samples (3+ Examples) PDF

Sample 1: Scholarly Article Review (History)

Assignment: Review a peer-reviewed journal article for a 200-level History course.

Article Cited: Smith, Jane A. "Beyond the Assembly Line: Informal Networks and Worker Agency in Detroit's Auto Plants, 1945-1970." *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2018, pp. 45-72.

Review:

Jane A. Smith's article, "Beyond the Assembly Line," makes a significant intervention in the historiography of postwar American labor. Moving beyond the traditional narratives of top-down union bureaucracy (exemplified by the UAW leadership) and managerial "Fordism," Smith argues that the shop floor was a site of nuanced agency for auto workers. She posits that informal networks—based on kinship, shared ethnicity, and illicit social activities—created a subterranean culture that allowed workers to exert control over the pace and nature of their work, resist arbitrary foremen, and maintain dignity in a dehumanizing environment.

Smith's methodology is a strength, drawing on an impressive array of oral history interviews from the "Detroit Voices" archive, union grievance records, and internal plant newsletters. This multi-source approach allows her to reconstruct the social world of the plants in vivid detail. Her analysis of the "break-time economies" and clandestine gambling rings is particularly compelling, demonstrating how these activities fostered solidarity and created alternative hierarchies independent of both management and formal union structures.

However, the article's narrow focus on two specific plants (the Ford River Rouge and Chrysler Jefferson complexes) raises questions about the broader applicability of her conclusions. While she acknowledges this limitation, a more sustained comparative moment with plants in other

regions would have strengthened her claim about a pervasive “informal network” culture.

Furthermore, her treatment of race, while present, feels secondary; a deeper analysis of how these informal networks were racially segmented or bridged would have added crucial complexity.

Despite these minor shortcomings, Smith’s article is a persuasive and illuminating piece of social history. It successfully challenges the view of postwar auto workers as passive cogs, replacing it with a portrait of resourceful individuals crafting spaces of autonomy. It is essential reading for scholars of labor, postwar America, and the history of capitalism.

Sample 2: Critical Book Review (Sociology)

Assignment: Write a 1000-word critical book review for a Sociology of Gender course.

Book Reviewed: Arlie Russell Hochschild. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. 3rd ed., University of California Press, 2012.

Review:

In the landmark work *The Managed Heart*, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild introduces the powerful concepts of “emotional labor” and “feeling rules,” fundamentally reshaping our understanding of work, gender, and selfhood in late capitalism. First published in 1983 and updated with a poignant new preface, the book’s thesis remains urgently relevant: when emotions are commodified—sold for a wage—workers engage in a deep, often gendered act of self-management that can lead to emotional alienation or “estrangement.”

Hochschild builds her theory through a brilliant comparative study of flight attendants (predominantly female) and bill collectors (predominantly male). For flight attendants, the feeling rule is to induce a sense of “safety and care” in passengers, requiring constant, friendly

deference. This labor, Hochschild argues, is systematically devalued because it aligns with stereotypical femininity. Conversely, bill collectors are paid to induce fear and anxiety, a performance of masculine aggression. Her detailed ethnographic observations reveal the techniques of this labor: “surface acting” (modifying outward expression) and the more psychologically costly “deep acting” (consciously evoking or suppressing real feelings to produce the required display).

The book’s greatest contribution is its Marxist-feminist synthesis. Hochschild convincingly argues that emotional labor represents a new frontier of capitalist exploitation, extracting not just physical or intellectual energy, but the very process of human connection. The gendered analysis is razor-sharp, exposing how the service economy profitably leverages patriarchal norms.

Critiques of *The Managed Heart* often center on its historical context. While the 2012 preface addresses the rise of the digital “outsourced self,” some readers may wish for a fuller update examining the gig economy and social media, where emotional labor is further fragmented and surveilled. Additionally, Hochschild’s focus on white-collar service jobs leaves questions about its application to other sectors.

Nevertheless, *The Managed Heart* is a sociological classic. Its framework is indispensable for analyzing contemporary workplaces, from call centers to healthcare to academia. Hochschild gave us the vocabulary to name a pervasive yet invisible form of labor, making this book a critical tool for understanding the personal costs of our service-oriented economy.

Sample 3: Literature Review Section for a Research Proposal (Psychology)

Assignment: Draft the literature review section for a proposed experimental study in a Cognitive Psychology research methods course.

Proposed Study Title: The Effect of Bilingual Language Switching on Cognitive Flexibility and Task-Switching Costs.

Literature Review:

The relationship between bilingualism and executive function is a well-established yet contested area of cognitive psychology. Foundational research by Bialystok et al. (2004, 2009) proposed a “bilingual advantage,” particularly in inhibitory control and conflict monitoring, stemming from the constant need to suppress one language while using another. This advantage is attributed to the strengthening of the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and anterior cingulate cortex, brain regions associated with executive control (Abutalebi & Green, 2007).

However, a recent wave of meta-analyses (e.g., Lehtonen et al., 2018; Paap et al., 2015) has failed to consistently replicate this advantage, leading to a “bilingual advantage controversy.”

Critics argue that publication bias, small sample sizes, and inconsistent task selection have inflated earlier claims. This discrepancy highlights a potential moderating variable: the *type* of bilingual experience.

Emerging research suggests that the key mechanism may not be inhibition alone, but *cognitive flexibility*—the ability to adapt thinking and shift attention between tasks or mental sets (Prior & MacWhinney, 2010). Green’s (1998) Inhibitory Control (IC) model and its successors posit that bilinguals develop superior task-switching abilities due to constant “language switching.”

Miyake and Friedman’s (2012) unity/diversity framework identifies “shifting” as a core executive function distinct from “inhibition,” providing a theoretical basis for this distinction.

Several studies support this shift in focus. Garbin et al. (2010) used fMRI to show that bilinguals exhibit reduced neural activation in switch-specific regions during non-linguistic task-switching paradigms, suggesting more efficient neural reconfiguration. Similarly, Prior and Gollan (2011)

found that frequent language switchers outperformed monolinguals and non-switching bilinguals on the color-shape task-switching test, indicating a direct link between switching behavior and domain-general cognitive flexibility.

Gap Identification: Despite these advances, a significant gap remains. Most studies correlate lifetime language-switching habits (via questionnaires) with cognitive performance. There is a lack of experimental studies that *manipulate* language-switching frequency in a controlled lab setting to establish a direct causal link. Furthermore, the specific component of task-switching cost (mixing cost vs. switching cost) most affected by bilingual switching is unclear.

This Proposed Study aims to address this gap by experimentally manipulating language-switching frequency in a cued picture-naming task and measuring its immediate after-effects on a subsequent non-linguistic task-switching paradigm (the Alternating Runs Protocol). This design will allow for a causal test of the hypothesis that active engagement in language switching enhances cognitive flexibility, as measured by reduced local switching costs.

These samples provide a developmental trajectory, from simple summaries in elementary school to sophisticated critical engagement in college, showcasing the increasing complexity in structure, analysis, and use of evidence.