

## Critique Example

The following example is excerpted from Behrens and Rosen's *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum* and Anne Greenwood's website.

*In reading the following example of a Summary with Critique, take note of the comments on choices made by the author. These appear in italics (and in green) within the body of the critique. This critique may be longer than the requirement for your assignment, but still serves as a good model for how to present the author's points in paraphrase and how to respond to these points with critique.*

*In addition, check out the use of quotation marks. For instance, there are times when this writer provides quotations as a means of quoting the original source (this is done with variety: some quotations are integrated using a whole sentence and a signal phrase while some are integrated into the wording of the sentence). At other times, the writer uses quotation marks around just one word to express the writer's feelings about the word or idea by the original source. In effect, the writer uses quotations to instill a sense of doubt or subtle irony. The word "peril" is a good example of this.*

### A Critique of Rosalie Pedalino Porter's "Perils in the Demand for Biculturalism"

In her essay "Perils in the Demand for Biculturalism," Rosalie Pedalino Porter, a director of bilingual and ESL programs, asks in effect: What's so great about ethnicity? Born into an immigrant Italian family, Porter draws on her own life to make the case against biculturalism. "I do not believe," she concludes, "that the bilingual child's best interests are necessarily served by large-scale institutional support for different cultures" (CITATION). In the course of her essay, Porter questions the value of traditional ethnicity and asserts that biculturalism may prevent minority children from becoming successes like herself. Porter's own experiences undeniably lend credibility to her arguments; but ultimately, these arguments fail to convince the reader of the "perils" of biculturalism. *If you are not comfortable referring to the abstract "reader," the end of the previous sentence could be rewritten in a passive voice: "but ultimately, these arguments do not adequately demonstrate the 'perils' of biculturalism."*

Porter begins by recalling that her own Italian father would have preferred that she and her sisters stayed home--- presumably until they were married off--- neither attending school nor learning English. But school, she writes, "opened my horizons" (CITATION). She enjoyed learning and met people of many different backgrounds--- things she would not have been able to do had her traditional father had his way. She explains, "I wanted to be free from what seemed the restrictive customs and language of my family and community" (CITATION). For some ethnic minorities, of course, liberation is not so easy. Porter tells of several young Afghan women who "longed" to go to college, but instead were forced by their families to marry. Returning to her own story, she notes that although she is more highly educated and fully assimilated than her siblings, she is in fact closer than they are to her "roots": she speaks Italian fluently and frequently travels to Italy. Her siblings, although living within more traditional Italian-American families, do neither. "We have each chosen the degree of ethnicity we wish to maintain," she declares, "I cannot honestly wish that I or my family had remained immersed in our original language and ethnicity" (CITATION).

*(This writer likes to end his or her paragraphs with quotations: something I have been known to warn against. Using quotations in this way is not "bad writing." I warn against it for students who have trouble forming clear paraphrasing or clear topic sentences. If you choose to end the paragraph on a quotation, be sure that you are not trying to get that quotation to work as a topic*

*sentence. Instead the quotation should just further illustrate a point already expressed in the paraphrasing or topic sentence that appears in your own words.)*

In the second part of her essay, Porter turns from her own case to the general issue of biculturalism, arguing that bicultural programs hurt minority children because they are “segregative,” while the “the ethic of American society is integrative” (CITATION). She shows that experts are skeptical of the success or value of bicultural programs in Sweden and Switzerland. How are children to successfully internalize the value systems of two radically different cultures? And don’t countries that encourage multiculturalism run the risk of fragmenting their societies? Porter acknowledges that in our own country ethnic minorities often try to hold on to their cultural ties because they have been cut off from the mainstream culture. But the problem of these minorities, she argues are less ethnic than economic, and “retention of their ethnicity” will not solve these economic problems. The desire for biculturalism, she contends, is really a “sentimental longing for a seemingly simpler past of shared traditions, closer communities, and stable families” (CITATION).

Strongly influenced by her own experience, Porter finds the traditional ethnic family stifling, yet remains proud of her aesthetic and linguistic connection to Italy. One problem with Porter’s position, however, lies in her assumption that such an abstracted interest in Italy (the interest of the Italophile, of the language student, of the traveler) amounts to an ethnic identity. Many members of minority groups--- perhaps even Porter’s own siblings--- might find they lead a more “Italian” lifestyle based on family values and traditions: religion, mealtimes, weddings, and other family gatherings. After all, isn’t Porter’s Italophile status the kind of thing that a Jewish, Swedish, or African-American person could attain by visiting Italy and studying the culture and language?

*(This first critique point has a few areas where it could be strengthened. The writer is perceptive in pointing out that Porter only uses herself as a model and that this is a problem for the central argument. In elaborating on this weakness, the writer could have focused on the ways Porter may not be representative as she is a student who does well in school and is a woman with much higher education and greater wealth than many other first generation children of immigrants. Or, the writer could simply have made the case that one example of success in a monocultural environment does not demonstrate that this will be successful for the majority. These kinds of critiques leveled at Porter’s case are a bit more convincing than arguing that Porter is ungrateful and self-centered).*

Porter’s reflection on her relationship to her personal heritage reveals the main weakness of her case--- her use of herself as her primary example. Initially helpful to her credibility, Porter’s limited self-analysis now becomes a double-edged sword to damage the logic of her argument. (observing that Porter’s status as an Italian-American gives her some credibility adds to the sense that this writer is objective and fair in her assessment of Porter’s article and arguments) Porter separates “good” from “bad” ethnicity; and the result is an arbitrary and illogical distinction. She describes how her father would have rather kept her at home, but she seems to take for granted the fact that once in school she flourished. Psychologists *(Who? What psychologists? This counter point needs to be a bit more specific. Referencing a specific source with a citation at the end of this sentence would be ideal. If possible, a specific psychologist, theory, or book should be mentioned)* point out that a child’s character is largely formed by age six or seven--- the years that a child spends in the home. If Porter were well adjusted enough emotionally and mentally to do well in school, shouldn’t she give her traditional family some of the credit? Her father may have wanted to deny her a higher education, but he must have done something right to produce a woman so intelligent and successful. Therefore, wouldn’t any credit due to him also be due to the Italian familial tradition that he so faithfully represented? Porter had decided to attribute all of her success to her participation in mainstream American life--- and, to a corresponding degree, herself. Her natural egotism (this begins to look defamatory) interferes with her logic and damages her larger goal--- to downplay the value of the ethnic traditions that would be diluted by assimilation.

*(The next critique point made by this writer is his or her strongest. It sticks to the problems with the case made for the ideas, carefully analyzing where needed explanation is left out and where the connotation of a term is used to discredit an idea).*

In the second part of her argument, Porter moves from an indictment of ethnicity (and praise for assimilation) to the charge that bilingual education programs segregate ethnic minorities from the majority and therefore harm the minority child. "Without sustained contact between majority and minority children," she argues, "there will be isolation of the minority group, shamefully like the 'separate but equal' policies that kept black children's schooling separate and unequal" (CITATION). But Porter's argument here against bilingual programs relies less on hard data than on assumptions about her audience's reaction to loaded language. When Porter calls education programs "by definition segregative in nature," she leaves it at that (CITATION). Her reference to the "separate but equal" policies of pre-civil rights America carries some weight, but she assumes that her audience will agree without questions that "segregation" means bad. Her argument does not take into account the fact that from a minority standpoint, segregative situations can be equal-- even superior--- to integrative ones. Ready to debate Porter on this point would be proponents of women's schools, such as Oakland Mills College, or all-African-American institutions, such as Howard University. Segregated education shelters minority students from ignorance and persecution, they would argue, allowing students to bond together for mutual support and allowing them to "bloom" unmolested. *(This last supporting example displays some concrete, specific detail and is therefore more convincing).*

Porter's related points about biculturalism are as sketchily argued. Citing the case of young Turkish girls in Sweden, she casts doubt on the ability of young immigrants to "internalize" differing value systems (such as cultural ideas and women's roles) while neatly forgetting that somehow she herself managed to overcome her Italian-American families beliefs concerning the place of women in the home. Porter might argue that America's opposition to biculturalism is what prompted her to assimilate; but many of us know immigrants and members of ethnic minorities who are able to internalize the cultural values of both their own and their adopted country without either putting themselves at a disadvantage or tearing the social fabric. This contradiction weakens her final paragraphs and her case against the workability of a bicultural and multicultural society.

Certainly, when ethnic minorities fail to assimilate, fail to come to terms with one another or the majority culture, they may resort to ethnic warfare. *(This transition feels a bit abrupt to me. I would suggest another sentence before the previous one that eases the reader into this example).* We have looked with horror at the bloodshed in what used to be Yugoslavia. And, recently, the violence in South-Central Los Angeles reminded us that America itself is not immune to such scourges. But in the face of such an urgent necessity to deal with our racial and ethnic differences, Porter offers only a traditional philosophy dating back to Horatio Alger--- faith in the individual to overcome all odds in his or her rise to the top of the ladder. The majority of immigrants in this land do not aspire, like Porter, to become professional educators and writers who regularly travel as tourists to their native land. They just want a basic opportunity; and biculturalism as an educational and social policy provides them with just that. Porter hasn't convinced me otherwise.