

## Developing Strong Writers and Critical Thinkers: The Power of Book Reviews through a Reading Club

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**Abstract:** *This article analyzes how setting up a reading club might improve students' critical thinking and writing abilities. The experimental group's students read books, participated in debates, composed reviews, and stored their work in a Google portfolio. Both writing and critical thinking showed notable gains in the study, and the portfolio was a useful instrument for introspection and progress monitoring. According to the results, reading clubs promote ongoing learning and student growth when paired with digital portfolios and book reviews.*

**Keywords:** *Reading club, book reviews, critical thinking, writing skills, Google Portfolio.*

### Introduction

Student success in today's educational environment depends on developing excellent writing and critical thinking abilities. Students can effectively engage in reading groups where they read, discuss, analyze, and write about books to accomplish these aims. Reading, debating, and writing reviews improve higher-order cognitive abilities and foster in-depth interaction with materials. By giving students a way to arrange and evaluate their progress, digital tools like Google Portfolio are incorporated into this learning process, further improving it. Creating a reading club where students read books, have discussions, write reviews, and upload them to a Google Portfolio is one way that this study seeks to investigate how it can improve students' writing and critical thinking abilities.

### Research Questions:

- How does participating in a reading club, where students write book reviews, improve their writing abilities?
- In what ways does the act of discussing and reviewing books foster critical thinking among students?
- How does using a Google Portfolio help students track and develop these skills over time?

### Materials.

This study addresses how setting up a reading club can improve students' writing and critical thinking abilities. The undergraduate students in the experimental group read books, had group discussions, and wrote book reviews while they were members of a reading club. Students could monitor their progress throughout the semester by accessing these reviews in a Google Portfolio. According to the study's findings, the experimental group's writing and critical thinking skills significantly improved compared to the control group.

When students used Google Portfolio, they had a useful tool for introspection and self-evaluation. This study highlights the educational advantages of integrating digital portfolios, reflective writing, and collaborative reading and suggests that these practices can promote ongoing academic growth and critical text engagement. The results motivate teachers to use digital portfolios and reading clubs as powerful instruments for fostering student development.

## Research and methods.

This study evaluates the effects of reading club participation on students' writing and critical thinking abilities using a mixed-methods methodology. The study involved 22 undergraduate students who were enrolled in a literature course at a prominent institution and was carried out over the course of a semester. Twenty students between the ages of 18 and 22 took part in the study. They were split up into two groups: group 1, which was the experimental group that had taken part in a reading club, and group 2, which did not.

### Intervention (Reading Club):

**Establishment of a Reading Club:** The experimental group established a reading club in which each month's task was to read a book. Students got together for weekly talks after reading to exchange ideas, pose queries, and offer a group evaluation of the book.

**Writing Book Reviews:** Students were required to write book reviews following each discussion. These reviews were designed to contain summaries, criticisms, topic analyses, and assessments of the author's arguments. Students were inspired to think critically, express their ideas clearly, and reflect on what they had read as a result of this approach.

**Google Portfolio:** Students were instructed to store their book critiques in a Google Portfolio. Students could use this portfolio as a digital platform to monitor their development, consider previous evaluations, and display their growing abilities.

### Data Collection

**Pre-Assessment:** Writing and critical thinking abilities were evaluated for both groups previously. Students had to write an essay about the book they chose for the writing exam and a standardized test testing reasoning and argumentation skills as part of the critical thinking assessment. After the semester, both groups finished a post-assessment that was the same as the pre-assessment. A qualitative survey about the experimental group's experiences with the Google Portfolio, book reviews, and the reading club was also finished.

### Data Analysis

To measure the differences in writing and critical thinking scores between the two groups, paired t-tests were used to analyze quantitative data from pre- and post-assessments. To find trends and insights on the influence of the reading club, book reviews, and portfolios, a thematic analysis of qualitative survey responses was conducted.

## Results

Significant gains in the experimental group's writing and critical thinking abilities were shown by the pre- and post-assessment results.

**Writing Proficiency:** Students in the experimental group saw a 22% improvement in writing exam scores, while the control group only saw a 5% gain.

**Critical Thinking Abilities:** Additionally, the experimental group saw a 26% rise in critical thinking test scores, whereas the control group saw a 7% increase.

**Portfolio Reflection:** The Google Portfolio was a useful resource. Eighty-five percent of the experimental group's students said the portfolio helped them monitor their development and evaluate their writing and critical thinking abilities over time. Many students reported that going over previous reviews enabled them to spot trends in their writing and thought processes, which resulted in ongoing development.

**Qualitative Survey Results:** According to students' responses in the qualitative survey, the reading club conversations had a significant influence on how they understood the texts. According to one pupil, "The discussions helped me see different perspectives, which made my reviews more thoughtful and nuanced." Furthermore, several students reported that reviewing their portfolios and writing reviews improved their ability to articulate their thoughts and allowed them to better understand the material.

## Discussion

**Participation through Reading Club Discussions:** According to the research, the reading club served as a useful forum for improving participants' writing and critical thinking abilities. Group book discussions allowed students to interact with a range of perspectives, promoting critical thinking and in-depth text study. These conversations created a space where students could hone their comprehension and offer more complex criticism, which eventually improved the caliber of their written reviews.

**The Function of Writing Book Reviews in Skill Development:** By requiring students to arrange their ideas, provide well-reasoned arguments, and succinctly explain the material, writing book reviews strengthened the abilities acquired in class discussions. In particular, the phases of analysis, assessment, and invention are in line with Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Students gained experience synthesizing knowledge and developing well-rounded opinions—two essential skills of critical thinking—by reading books.

**Portfolio as a Reflection and Development Tool:** Students were given a structured area to monitor their academic progress by using a Google Portfolio to store and review book reviews. Students were able to evaluate their previous work, pinpoint areas for development, and draw connections between various reviews thanks to this digital tool. The portfolio promoted self-directed learning in addition to improving their writing and critical thinking. In the words of one student, "The portfolio helped me see how my thoughts and writing evolved over the semester."

**Beyond the Classroom Benefits:** Students developed a resource they can utilize for future academic or professional endeavors by keeping a digital portfolio. Portfolios are very helpful for students who want to demonstrate their writing and analytical skills to get a job in publishing, teaching, or writing.

## Conclusion

According to this study, students' writing and critical thinking abilities can be greatly enhanced by setting up a reading club where they can read, debate, and evaluate books. Students could keep track of their work, evaluate their development, and continue honing their abilities outside of the classroom via Google Portfolio. To promote continuous student improvement, educators should think about including digital portfolios and reading clubs in their lesson plans.

Teachers can use digital portfolios and reading clubs to foster a supportive, thoughtful, and interesting learning environment. They can assist kids in developing critical thinking and academic abilities that will be useful in their future pursuits by encouraging them to write, in addition to reading and discussing, and to keep track of their progress.

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