**CHAPTER 7 Evaluations**

Evaluations are similar to reviews in several ways, but they are also significantly different. In a review, a writer expresses his or her opinion, which is based on common expectations about what makes something appealing or effective. In an evaluation, the writer uses a *specific set of criteria* to determine the quality and effectiveness of a product, service, or person. In consumer magazines, like *Consumer Reports*, evaluations are used to assess the quality of products like cars, televisions, and mobile phones. In the workplace, personnel evaluations are used to determine how well an employee is doing his or her job.

The main difference between writing a *review* of something and writing an *evaluation* is simple. An evaluation uses a set of clearly defined criteria to objectively measure the quality of the subject. A review relies on the unstated “common expectations,” which are shared between the writer and reader, to support an opinion.

In your advanced college courses, you will write evaluations that assess the quality of projects and products related to your field of study. In the workplace, evaluations are critical, because they help people understand the merits and shortcomings of products, services, and employees. In fact, when you start your first professional job, chances are good that your supervisor will need to write an evaluation of you in the first six months of your employment.

**AT–A–GLANCE: Evaluations**

*Here are two basic organizations for an evaluation, but other arrangements of these sections will work, too. You should alter these organizational patterns to fit your topic, angle, purpose, readers, and context.*

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**Overview**

An evaluation typically has the following features:

* • **An introduction** that identifies the subject being evaluated.
* • **A set of defined criteria** that can be used to measure the quality or effectiveness of the subject.
* • **A description** of the subject.
* • **A criterion-by-criterion discussion** of the subject.
* • **A conclusion** that offers an overall assessment of the subject.

An evaluation tends to follow an organization similar to the ones shown on [page 103](http://online.vitalsource.com/books/9781256083993/content/id/pg103). These patterns can be altered to fit the topic, purpose, reader, and context of your evaluation. In some cases, the organization for an evaluation will be rigid. Personnel reviews, for example, are almost formulaic, because they need to be consistent within a company. Product evaluations, like the ones you might find in *Consumer Reports* magazine, are much more flexible, so they can be used to judge a range of items.

**ONE STUDENT’S WORK: Evaluations**

**How We Ended Up in Louisville: An Evaluation of Spring Break Options**

Danielle Cordaro

My junior year in high school, I went to Cancun for spring break. My senior year I went to Miami, Florida. Of course, my parents paid for everything. But now that I’m in college, my parents are off the hook. They figure that paying for my tuition fulfills all their parental duties. So last year I had to figure out how to go on spring break and still have fun on a college student’s budget. I work part time at Western Michigan’s library, so I did have some money—exactly $606.76. Some of our friends were planning on going to exotic places like Jamaica or the Virgin Islands, but the remaining five of us were in the same boat in terms of funds. We decided to sit down and decide what we wanted out of our spring vacation.

Writer provides background information.

I was surprised to find out that our priorities and preferences had changed since high school. Most of us weren’t really looking for a big party; we just wanted to get away from school and relax. We decided on a few key criteria. First, we wanted to go somewhere that provided a good mix of activity and relaxation time for five days and six nights. Second, lodging and food could not cost us more than $60 per person per night. Finally, we agreed to use no more than one tank of gas each way to get to and from our destination. That meant that, in our most fuel-efficient car, we could go a maximum of 360 miles from Kalamazoo, Michigan.

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The criteria are identified and defined.

**Weighing Our Options**

Looking at a map, I came up with three possible places to go, which included South Haven, Michigan, Chicago, and Louisville. Then I used my criteria to weigh the pros and cons of each one.

*Option 1: Cabining in South Haven, Michigan*

**Pros:** South Haven is only about an hour’s drive from Kalamazoo. Right on Lake Michigan, it’s a hopping place for college students during the summer months. In the spring, before the water is warm enough to swim in, it’s a bit more subdued. The upside about visiting in spring is there are not too many tourists around, which makes activities out in nature more peaceful. South Haven has miles of hiking trails along the shores of Lake Michigan, as well as canoeing, fishing, and horseback riding. There’s shopping in the downtown area and a few inexpensive good restaurants. Other plusses include the accommodations. One nice thing about vacationing in Michigan in the middle of April is that it is considered the “off-season.” For $200 I found a luxury cabin with accommodations for five people. The cabin included a hot tub outside, a whirlpool bath inside, a large flat-screen HDTV.

The criteria are used to discuss pros and cons of each option.

**Cons:** There isn’t much to do in town, and not many other college students would be around. A few restaurants and bars would be open during the off-season, but they aren’t too exciting. Going to South Haven would mean having to make our own fun. So we might find ourselves hanging out in our “luxury cabin” bored out of our minds. You can only hang out in the hot tub and watch that flat-screen HDTV so much before wanting to get out and see some people.

*Option 2: Living Large in Chicago*

**Pros:** Chicago is an exciting city with a lot to do. The shopping on Michigan Avenue is legendary. Inexpensive, more educational activities include the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Shedd Aquarium, and the Field Museum. If we wanted to pamper ourselves, we could go to a day spa. One great thing about Chicago is the inexpensive public transportation. If we planned things right, we could avoid cabs and take the elevated train pretty much everywhere, including to the surrounding suburbs for a few dollars. The restaurants in Chicago are also fantastic, as well as the nightlife. There was no way we could get bored in Chicago—as long as our money held out.

**Cons:** Chicago is expensive. Parking alone can cost up to twenty dollars a day, even at your own hotel. Good food and adequate lodging are also expensive with meals and hotel running about $80 per person per day. Even at that price, the accommodations wouldn’t be luxurious. I was able to find a room in our budget, but one of us would have to sleep on a rollaway cot.

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