

# How, Why, and When to Write a Critique

Like writing a summary, writing a critique may be both a professional and academic writing assignment. Unlike writing a summary, however, when writing a critique, you ARE expected to formulate an argument in response to the author's ideas. This is a very challenging critical thinking writing assignment, so it will take careful reading, planning, writing, and revising before you can expect to satisfactorily complete this writing assignment.

To help you understand how to write a critique, I am going to take through several steps of a required writing assignment I have for my upper division English 306 students at California State University, San Bernardino.

## Step 1: The Writing Assignment

Write a 3 to 4 page essay addressing the following-

Evaluate Didion's article "[On Self-Respect](#)." (Click on the hyper-linked text to read her article.)

To recognize the strengths and weaknesses of Didion's approach to defining self-respect and to give you a standard of comparison on which you can base your judgment, you will want to compare her to Douglass, Rose, Rodriguez, Walker, King, or Murray, all of whom view self-respect from varying dimensions. You may also use your personal knowledge of self-respect as a basis of comparison.

Do you agree with her that self-respect is more important than reputation? Why or why not?

## Step 2: Getting Started

1. To decode this assignment, separate it into the following:

- Evaluate Didion's article "On Self-Respect."
- To recognize the strengths and weaknesses of Didion's approach to defining self-respect and to give you a standard of comparison on which you can base your judgment, you will want to compare her to Douglass, Rose, Rodriguez, Walker, King, or Murray, all of whom view self-respect from varying dimensions.
- You may also use your personal knowledge of self-respect as a basis of comparison.

- Do you agree with her that self-respect is more important than reputation? Why or why not?
2. Now take some of the key words from the assignment and look them up in a dictionary. Do this step even if you already know the meanings of the key words. This may help you to focus your ideas later on.
- What does "evaluate" knowledge mean?
  - What does "standard" mean?
  - What does "comparison" mean?
  - What does "judgment" mean?
  - What does "agree" mean?
  - What does "self-respect" mean?
  - What does "reputation" mean?

### **Characteristics of Evaluative Writing**

People form opinions about movies, television programs, books, magazines, computer games, music albums, concerts, plays, dances, performances, an actor's performance, or a player's performance after they have had a chance to watch or read them. Such opinions are called evaluations. In this type of writing, you are to persuade by argumentation by applying appropriate standards of value to Didion's essay and by providing readers with a convincing argument that supports your evaluation. You want your readers to agree with your evaluation. In short, you should aim to

- Thoroughly present the subject
  - Make a clear, authoritative judgment
  - Use appropriate reasons and plausible support
  - Include a counterargument
1. To thoroughly present the subject, you will need to annotate and take inventory of Didion's essay *On Self-Respect*.
- Read the essay as a believer in that you try to see the concept of self-respect through the author's eyes.
- Temporarily suspend your own biases so you can hear what the writer is saying.
- Sketch an outline of how self-respect is defined by the author.
- Read the essay now as a skeptic by questioning what is NOT in Didion's argument.

Is there anything unexplained or left out?

At this point of your annotating, you should add marginal comments demanding proof, doubting evidence, challenging the author's assumptions, and values.

As you continue your analysis of Didion's essay, you should consider the rhetorical context of the argument and also its genre. Genre refers to a recurring pattern of argument such as a letter to an editor, a scholarly journal article, or in this case a personal experience scholarly essay. The rhetorical context refers to the topic about which the writer is writing and about the writer's credentials, purpose, audience, and motivation. To examine the rhetorical context and genre of Didion's argument, consider the following questions:

Who is Didion?

To what audience is she writing?

What motivating occasion prompted this writing?

What is Didion's purpose in writing this essay?

How do the conventions of this writing genre determine the depth and complexity of her argument?

2. To make a clear, authoritative judgment, you need to make a judgment about Didion by looking at her argument and her writing style. To evaluate her argument, consider the following questions:

Does her argumentative essay follow a logical structure?

Is her essay convincing?

Do you accept her definition of self-respect?

Does she give appropriate reasons to support her view?

How does Didion's writing style and her defining what self-respect is compare to other writers such as Douglass, Rose, Rodriguez, Walker, King, or Murray? How does it compare to your personal knowledge of what self-respect is?

To prevent from having a flawed argument in your writing, make sure that you base your evaluation on standards of value that readers are likely to agree are appropriate for judging that kind of subject. For example, if you are writing an evaluation of why the *Terminator* trilogy is good and base your judgment on the fact that *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* movies do not display the level of violence necessary to meaningfully engage the audience, you will have

a flawed argument in your reasoning, for you are not comparing subjects of the same class. *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, both PG rated movies, are constrained by the level of violence that can be shown, whereas *Terminator*, rated R and aimed at a more mature audience, is able to display that kind of graphic violence. A better comparison upon which the writer can base his judgment might be *Bladerunner*, which is also rated R and also represents a movie of the science fiction genre.

To make a judgment of Didion's writing style, you must settle on criteria that is generally agreed upon as being good writing. There are four areas for which you might look to help you make a solid judgment about Didion's writing style: structure, tone, clarity, and overall effect.

**Does the essay have appropriate structure?** In analyzing this, you should look at what purpose the pieces (beginning, middle, and end) of Didion's writing serve. How does each part of her writing work in conjunction with other parts of her writing to create a meaningful whole? Determining the shape of Didion's writing, structure controls the order in which you receive certain pieces of information, perhaps inspiring you or enlightening you in some way. Flashbacks and recurring themes in movies and books are examples of structure.

**Does the essay have appropriate tone?** Similar to the tone in a piece of music, writing also has a tone, resembling the feel of the overall piece of writing. Tones can vary from being sophisticated as in a sad story, down-to-earth as in a political speech, or eloquent. Being more than just emotion, tone is seen as the consistent manner in which every single construction is created, executed, and therefore received in a piece of writing. Put another way, tone is Didion's overall attitude toward her subject.

**Does the essay have clarity?** The ease with which you understand the meaning of writing, clarity is dependent upon the definiteness or directness of the writer's ideas and the extent to which the author follows standard grammatical and mechanical conventions.

**What is the overall effect?** A harmonious combination of structure, tone, and clarity create an overall effect. You must judge the singularity of Didion's essay. Does her essay leave you with a single, overwhelming emotion or idea? If so, what is it? Do you feel that the writing has accomplished its purpose? Are you left with several different ideas and emotions, without anything particularly powerful or interesting? If so, your judgment may be that the writing lacks singularity. Whether the writing is to inform, entertain, solicit, or argue, the writing needs to accomplish its purpose.

3. You will need to use appropriate reasons and plausible support to support your evaluation of Didion's essay.

4. Without waffling on a clearly stated judgment, you will also need to present a counterargument.

Not all readers are likely to agree with the way you evaluate Didion's essay, so you should anticipate opposing arguments and explain what you think is wrong with them. Whether you present your counterargument after stating your thesis and before developing your own arguments or whether you anticipate objections as you develop your evaluation paragraph by paragraph, you should do your best to refute them. Show that these counterarguments are flawed or that your arguments have greater weight. Moreover, it is wise to establish some common ground with the reader by showing that you share some of the readers' values; consequently, those who disagree with your view may be more likely to switch to your position without feeling that they have given up too much.

### **Characteristics of Taking a Position Writing**

Another form of argumentative writing, taking a position is the last part of this writing assignment: *Do you agree with her that self-respect is more important than reputation? Why or why not?* This need not be dealt with in the same depth as the evaluative part of the assignment. Nonetheless, you should state whether you agree or disagree that self-respect is more important than reputation.

Decide which position you want to take.

List reasons in support of your position.

List opposing view points and refute them.

Consider how you can transition this part of the essay with the evaluative part.

### **Choosing the right focus.**

Write a sentence justifying the appropriateness of your topic.

If you have any doubts about your topic, consider discussing your choice with me (1) by E-mail at [mbuckhoff@aol.com](mailto:mbuckhoff@aol.com) , (2) during class at the appropriate time, or (3) at my office. It is much less painful to refocus your topic at this stage of the writing assignment since you do yet not have a complete, highly polished draft.

Once you have generated 6-8 pages in this stage of your writing, you are ready to move on to the planning and drafting stage.

### Step 3: Planning and Drafting

Once the initial period of invention is completed, you should review what you have learned about the topic and start to plan your essay. Planning requires you to put your ideas into a coherent, purposeful order appropriate to your readers; drafting challenges you to find the words that will be understandable and interesting for those readers. Invention continues as you draft, for you will continue to make further discoveries about your topic as you work. But drafting requires you to shift your focus from generating new ideas and gathering further information to forging new and meaningful relations among your ideas and information.

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1. Formulate a tentative introduction and thesis statement, around which you organize an essay. Of course this may be revised later on, so remember that it is not indelible. Write one or two sentences that could serve as a strong, explicitly stated, and appropriately qualified thesis statement. Consider using a forecast statement to introduce some key points which assert a clear and strong judgment.

**An evaluation of the music played on WXYZ reveals that most songs depict sex vulgarly, sanction the abuse of women and police officers, promote gang violence, and encourage the purchasing and selling of illicit drugs.**

It is evident from the above evaluative thesis that the writer has thought not only about the introduction but also about the major sections of the paper, each of which will discuss one of the criticisms mentioned in the thesis. Additionally, the thesis is appropriately qualified because some would agree that songs depicting crude sex, encouraging abuse of women and police, and fostering gang violence and illicit drugs can be criteria used in judging whether or not a radio station is presenting an appropriate form of music to a mass audience. Finally, the thesis asserts a clear and strong judgment on the subject matter.

2. Using your getting started notes, make a brief outline to refocus your ideas. You can note on your outline where you plan to plan to address opposing arguments.

3. Use the outline as a guide as you draft.

## Step 4: Revising

After writing your critique, you should go through use the below self-assessment form to help you determine the strengths and weaknesses of your critique. Make a written response to each question so that you will be able to meaningfully and substantively revise your first draft of this writing assignment.

### **Self-Assessment: Assignment One (Student's Version)**

#### **Stage One:**

1. Do you state an overall judgment about the article?

Is the judgment clear in your essay? If so, where? Bracket the part of your essay which states your judgment.

If not, where could you incorporate this information. Note it here.

2. Is your judgment mostly positive or mostly negative? Or is your judgment mixed (pointing out what you like and dislike about the article)?

If your overall judgment seems too indecisive or too extreme (overly positive or overly negative), you may need to clarify your thesis or qualify it more carefully.

If you could not find where your overall judgment is stated, you may not have an arguable, limited, and sharply-focused thesis. Readers will expect to know what your judgment is.

4. If you have answered "yes" to these questions, write your thesis (within which a judgment is asserted) as it appears in your essay:

If the answer is no, go on to Stage Two, but when you have completed the self-assessment, revisit this question and work on developing your thesis more fully. Then write the revised version here:

#### **Stage Two:**

1. Read through your essay draft and number each paragraph in the left-hand margin (1, 2, 3, etc.)

2. Read through your essay again and, as you do, make notes on it just as you would make notes on your readings:

A. In the right-hand margin, in one sentence summarize each paragraph. If you can not do this, it is possible that the paragraph is not focused enough.

B. Underline the sentence containing the main point of each paragraph. Most paragraphs are organized around a main point and as in the case of evaluative writing,

each paragraph can be organized using an appropriate reason backing up your overall judgment.

C. In the left-hand margin, rather than write what you are saying in each paragraph, write what the paragraph is doing. For example, is the paragraph summarizing the author's purpose for writing the article, or is the paragraph discussing how the author makes his/her points? Perhaps the paragraph explains why you like or dislike the article and provides sub-support details (textual evidence in the form of quotations, paraphrases, or summaries) to back up your assertions.

D. Within each paragraph, highlight summary-type (using a yellow marker) and judgment-type sentences (using a pink marker).

### Stage Three:

Now that you have re-seen your essay, you are almost ready to revise it. First, make some notes right on this page.

1. Review the notes in your right-hand margin. Does each summary match your topic sentences in each paragraph?

Does each paragraph have a topic sentence or an implied one?

If not, what paragraphs do you need to change and how will you change them—perhaps by adding a topic sentence, changing the one you have, combining two or more paragraphs?

Is there anywhere in the essay in which you can improve your transitions from old information to new?

Mark your paragraphs in some way to remind yourself if you need to make some changes.

2. Review your right-hand margin notes. Is each topic sentence developed and supported by the paragraph's details and examples?

If not, where should you add supporting explanations?

Where should you delete any unrelated details?

Are the reasons appropriate for judging articles or books?

\_\_\_\_\_ Put another way, does your argument employ standards commonly used for judging articles or books? For example, an accepted standard for judging articles or books is if the writer has achieved his/her intended purpose or if the writer presents a compelling, credible argument.

3. Review your highlighted sentences indicating summary or judgment. Since you are writing to your classmates (the intended audience in this case), you can assume that they know what the article is about, but you can not assume that they know what you think about the article and why. Therefore, you should take care that you summarize sufficiently so your readers can appreciate your judgment. Is there any unnecessary or repetitive summary that you can



delete? If so, where? Note it here.

Should you add more judgment? If so, where? Note it here.

Mark your paragraphs in some way to remind yourself if you need to make some changes.

4. Go through and highlight the direct quotes you use in your paper and make sure of the following:

A. Does each quote support your overall judgment?

B. Have you introduced these quotes with a signal phrase, hence smoothly integrating them into your own ideas?

5. Where is the counter-argument and what is its purpose? To acknowledge, to accommodate, to refute readers' objections, questions, or alternative judgments?

Bracket the part of the essay containing the counter-argument.

Is the counter argument strong (not superficial or dismissive)?

If not, how can you strengthen it? Note it here.

Make some notes to remind yourself if you need to make some changes.

#### **Stage IV:**

Go back and revise your essay with all of the answers to these questions in mind so that in your next revision you can answer "yes!" to all of these questions.

**Grading Form for Essay One: (Instructor's version)**

This is the grading form that I will use to grade your critique when it is in its final draft ready-to-be-graded version:

1. The writer asserts a clear and strong judgment adequately supported by specific details from the text and from personal experience, resulting in a well-supported, compelling argument. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
  
2. The writer applies appropriate standards of evaluation suitable to the personal experience scholarly genre. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
  
3. The writer uses enough summary so that readers can understand the judgment (and not to the extent that it overshadows the judgment).0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
  
4. The writer, presenting a reasonable tone, addresses and refutes the counter-argument, all the while not waffling on the issue.0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
  
5. The writer has coherently and logically organized his/her ideas supported by apt reasons and well-chosen examples, 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
  
6. The writer makes a thoughtful and in-depth evaluation. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40
  
7. Essay meets the 4-5 page length requirement, follows MLA documentation and format (Hacker 371-377), and smoothly integrates quotes, summaries, and paraphrases into the essay (Hacker 334-340). 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
  
8. In-class self-assessment workshop is thoughtfully completed. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
  
9. Essay is critically read by at least two readers during the in-class middle draft peer workshop. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
  
10. Essay is generally free from errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

\_\_\_\_\_ points out of 220 points = \_\_\_\_\_

## Step Five: Sample Essays

Here are two sample essays which critique Didion's Essay "On Self-Respect." It will be a good idea for you to read her article one more time so that you can better understand the two writers' critiques. [CLICK HERE](#) to read Didion's article.

Also, note that the first writer hates the article and explains why, whereas the second writer gives praise to Didion and her ideas. Both writers scored an A on the assignment so it does matter whether you agree or disagree with the writer's ideas. What does matter is how you go about organizing your critique of her article. Both writers have depth and complexity of thought to their ideas, present a coherent organization to their critiques, support their assertions with textual evidence and analysis, and have a high level of polish to their writing.

### An Evaluation of Joan Didion's *On Self Respect* by Carey

Not only did I find Didion's essay to be a tedious and meandering read but it is also my opinion that the reading had an almost schizophrenic justification to it. Multiple readings of this essay were required in order to ascertain what the colorful illustrations and seemingly unexplainable examples she chose to more fully express her points had to do with the intended subject matter. Admired as a stylistic masterpiece, some people find her writing charming. That was not my experience. And it isn't that I disagree with Didion's core thesis. Quite the opposite, I concur with the majority of the conclusions she reaches. What I don't see eye to eye on with Joan Didion is her use of style as the basis for her argument. Her style is to jolt her reader by the juxtaposition of the examples she employs to prove her point. Her forceful personality argues, "listen to me, see it my way, change your mind"; however, my preference is to hear the argument based on clear and convincing evidence and then decide for my self if it is worth it's weight.

My battle with Didion and this particular work is that the emotional tone throughout is flashy and obvious but missing that connection to the reading. Didion has been celebrated as one of the leading practitioners of a new kind of highly wrought personal journalism. This is well illustrated by the use of her personal testimony that "innocence ends when one is stripped of the delusion that one likes oneself." She leaves space for thousands of similarly disaffected readers to enter her prose and passionately identify with it. I find that statements such as these are both frustrating and amazing. Anyone can state an opinion but a good writer presents compelling evidence or examples by which to prove their point. Maybe I am in a certain minority of readers who are not impressed by her dolorous tone or her uncoupled connection between what happens in her head and heart that she feels is important enough

to include in her definition and evaluation of self-respect.

Sometimes her tricks appear to be merely cheap, such as her use of Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan to emphasize the compulsion to please others, but in fact some could be considered destructive or malicious. One analogy I found to be particularly distasteful was her declaration that "people with self-respect have the courage of their mistakes. They know the price of things" and then comparing these people to adulterers. The use of adultery as her persuasive point is offensive. Does she mean to imply that adulterers exhibit self-respect if they do not confess or seek forgiveness? Does having the courage to make mistakes or knowing the price of things relieve the person of making a poor moral choice? We should each have our own, unique definition of what is right and wrong but Didion's use of adultery to make her point seems irresponsible and irrational.

While the reader is left to contemplate the connection she is trying to make and within the same paragraph, she goes on to state "people with self-respect exhibit a certain toughness, a kind of moral nerve; they display what was once called *character*." How can she jump between absolving poor life choices to ascribing the quality of character to an adulterer? What is tragically absurd is that by using adultery in this analogy she calls more attention to its justification than to building on the point she is making. Didion's choice of the use of adultery in this passage serves to inflame the reader driving away the connection to the worthy conclusion.

While it is true that examples and illustrations provide an emotional dimension that can help bolster a point it appears that Didion relies too heavily on this tactic to drive home her position. For example, paragraph 9 states "That kind of self-respect is a discipline, a habit of mind that can never be faked but can be developed, trained, coaxed forth." She follows that impressive statement by recounting how she learned to put her head in a paper bag as an antidote to crying. By explaining the psychological effects of the action she takes so that she can control her crying she loses the coherence of the point she is trying to make in supporting the argument of this paragraph. By inserting this odd image she loses the weight of her important statement because she does not link them together. By looking hard at the entire paragraph its argument wilts because there is just enough truth in it to slip by unnoticed. Glaring examples such as this one are littered throughout this essay and they should not be allowed to slip by without comment.

Her bag of tricks or techniques can be learned; I don't know why they have evoked so much wonder. The way this writer deals with presenting her view is by the use of strong style as argument and for Didion surface only matters. Maybe I am in the certain minority of readers who are not impressed by the presence of colorful but weak analogies, arguments with questionable premises, hasty generalizations, or her unfair emotional appeals.

The main reason I don't care for this essay is that after reading and rereading her essay I find it hard to see precisely what her reasons and arguments are for the need to understand and nurture our self-respect. The value of this essay could be strengthened if not allowed to follow a path led by Didion's need to make it a point of honor to struggle for meaning. I do not require that a novelist eradicate all mystery but once you have my attention take the opportunity to lead me on that path even if we end up at different destinations. Indeed anything worth knowing or having has a price and a unique meaning to everyone but Didion does not go far enough out there while she has us as her captive readers.

While I do not agree with the overall approach that Didion has taken in her attempt to share her opinion and influence others regarding her position on self-respect, I do agree with the conclusion I believe she is trying to make regarding the differences between self-respect and reputation. The definition of self-respect given by Didion as a certain toughness or character might also be applied to reputation except that motivation and intent need to be taken into consideration when placing these two values side by side. To live to have a good, or bad, reputation takes out the personal value of the deeds. The person didn't act or behave in a certain way because it was their intent: it was for the fulfillment of the reputation that they acted. The reputation becomes the receiver of the deed not the person or situation. To live with self-respect regardless of reputation shows the true intent of the deed; therefore, the deed becomes more important than the doer. Self-scrutiny is required to examine our true motivations for our actions so that what we intend to do is what is a true representation of our best life and not just what we want to be known for.

When one compares the writings of Didion with Frederick Douglass and his essay *Resurrection*, there is similarity in that they both had precise moments in which they recognize the need to establish their self worth. Douglass' defiance of Mr. Covey and Didion's rejection at the sorority are equally significant because it was the motivating factor that spurred on their personal growth. While they seemingly have nothing in common, their experiences point to the fact that anyone can be open to change at any time. Even though it would seem that Douglass had more at stake as a slave who knows where Didion would be in life if she hadn't accepted that she needed to make adjustments: her slavery could have taken another form.

An Evaluation of *Didion's On Self-Respect*

by

Karilyn

Reputation is a catalyst in the decline of self-respect. Worrying about what others might think or how they perceive oneself clouds the ability to think, act, and make decisions for oneself. Becoming so consumed with what others expect from oneself causes self-deception, a hiding of oneself, a burying of the true self for the beneficial perception of others. Although Didion's view on what one can get away with while still maintaining self-respect may be questionable, even shocking to some, when examined further her assessments of what self-respect is, the pitfalls of self-deception, and the benefits of risking reputation, illustrate the freedom or paralyzation of oneself while defending the pursuit of self-respect as more significant than reputation.

Didion's bold and "in your face" approach as an author allows her readers to see her point of view clearly and without question. In her essay, "On Self-Respect," Didion's candid tactics of truth grab her readers' attention and keeps it throughout the essay. She charges the reader with the reality of "The tricks that work on others count for nothing in that very well-lit back alley where one keeps assignments with oneself: no winning smiles will do here, no prettily drawn list of good intentions" (p. 63). As difficult as it may be for some to admit to these games played with themselves, Didion's curt approach forces the readers to examine such actions. While some may argue this method of writing may deter or even offend her readers, it is simply Didion's self-characterization of her writing. In her own words she describes this style as coaxing her readers to "listen to me, see it my way, change your mind" (p.62). This authoritative approach is not only creative, it is a necessity when trying to convince her audience that self-respect is more important than reputation.

Self-respect, according to Didion, "has nothing to do with reputation" (p.63). Looking superficially at this statement, one could argue self-respect and reputation have everything to do with each other; however, they would be wrong. Didion's opening paragraphs explain a time when she had "misplaced" her self-respect, describing herself as a typical disappointed college student who was not invited to join the college sorority Phi Beta Kappa, setting the stage for her argument that self-respect is more essential to one's life than is reputation, while at the same time connecting with her readers and making herself human. She continues her essay by insisting self-respect "has nothing to do with the face of things, but concerns instead a separate peace, a private reconciliation" (p.63). This statement reinforces Didion's argument that one cannot have self-respect if one is caught up in faking out those around her. Where would the civil rights movement be had Martin Luther King not been willing to push beyond the acceptance or "maintenance of the status quo?" (392). In his letter to the clergymen King writes, "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed" (p.392). Had King been concerned with "the face of things" he would not have gone to Birmingham to

confront those who were causing such oppression to the black community. He knew it would be very possible for him to end up in jail; but because he had self-respect, and as Didion would characterize, he was not worried about what would happen to his reputation if he were arrested.

While Didion clearly holds self-respect above reputation throughout her essay, she also undoubtedly identifies the act of placing concern for reputation over self-respect as danger to the individual. Martin Luther King recognized this danger as he confronted the clergymen, who were more concerned with their reputation than their self-respect, for publicly condemning King for his "unwise and untimely" "direct-action campaign" (pp. 389, 392). Didion would refer to these clergymen as being "an unwilling audience of one to an interminable documentary that details one's failings, both real and imagined, with fresh footage spliced in for every screening," while King would refer to them as "lukewarm" and unable to commit themselves to the cause because they were afraid of losing their, as Didion would say, reputation (pp. 63, 395). Reputation is not what these men have lost; they have lost their self-respect.

In her essay, Didion successfully defends her stand on self-respect versus reputation by explaining the danger of self-deception. The men of cloth that King writes from the Birmingham jail are examples of people caught up in a whirlwind of self-deception. They are so busy trying to maintain their public image that they fail to see the importance of King's demonstration, and perhaps their own beliefs. As a result, these men are sacrificing their self-respect and deceiving themselves in order to save face with popular opinion. According to Didion, "self-deception remains the most difficult deception" (p.63). She illustrates this point poignantly by discussing the act of adultery. At first, her approach may seem shockingly immoral; but if read carefully, her point is well received. Didion challenges her readers with the thought of acknowledging one's failings and taking responsibility for one's actions as another way of maintaining self-respect. "If they choose to commit adultery, they do not then go running, in an access of bad conscience, to receive absolution from the wronged parties; nor do they complain unduly of the unfairness, the undeserved embarrassment, of being named co-respondent" (p.64). By owning up to who one is instead of hiding from oneself and by standing up for what one believes in instead of projecting the popular public opinion demonstrates what Didion equates as self-respect.

Didion also characterizes people with self-respect by emphasizing, "People who respect themselves are willing to accept the risk..." that a situation may not turn out the way they plan and they accept the outcome anyway (p.64). Such risk may be difficult for one to pursue; however, it is an integral part of achieving and maintaining self-respect. Douglass demonstrates this pursuit of risk in his essay "Resurrection." Douglass describes in detail his plight as an abused slave and reflects on the risk he took to stand up to Mr. Covey, even in the face of death. In his concluding remarks Douglass reflects, "It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived with me a sense of my own manhood. ...and inspired me

again with a determination to be free" (p.52). Didion describes such a risk as "recognizing that anything worth having has its price" and Douglass, as well as King, exhibit their willingness to ultimately risk their lives and reputations in order to maintain their self-respect. While it would have been much easier for King to stay home and not confront the segregation in Birmingham, he would have been denying everything he believed in and fought for throughout his life. He did not care what others thought, he was not concerned with the "reputation" he might have if imprisoned. The clergymen, on the other hand, are the antithesis of King and Douglass, displaying their ability to play the role of someone they are not, "curiously determined to live out...their [others'] false notions of us [them]" (p.65).

Although Didion's opinion throughout her essay may seem ruthless to the causal reader, she uses this callous approach to reach readers who are guilty of putting more effort into maintaining a good reputation than those who strive for self-respect. She writes this essay to encourage, not to discourage, readers in adopting her opinion on the meaning of self-respect, as well as to recognize its dissimilarity to the meaning of reputation. Didion clearly defines self-respect as allowing oneself to see the failings of one's life, as well as taking responsibility for one's actions, regardless of the consequences. Self-respect is not worrying about what others think about oneself, but how the individual sees one's own personal character and acts accordingly. King and Douglass are admirable examples of people who possess self-respect. They encompass Didion's definition of self-respect and are examples of individuals who do not worry about their reputations. While one may argue the importance of reputation, there is no denying the enormity of pursuing self-respect.