

Five main points for critical writing

- 1. Remember:** Good writing starts with good reading. Read regularly, critically and well – peer reviewed journals, etc.
- 2. Clear communication and analysis:** The aim of critical writing is to communicate something and evaluate supportive and contrasting views. No matter how good your understanding of extant literature or how creative your ideas, if you cannot present them in a way that others can understand and critique, you will not be achieving academic rigour.
- 3. Defend a particular point of view or position:** The aim in writing on a specified topic is to defend/oppose a particular view or, if you cannot decide whether to defend or oppose a statement, to show what considerations support your different possible answers. It may be helpful to think of yourself as trying to convince somebody who takes an opposite view to the one you adopt. Alternatively, if you 'Don't know', try to convince those who think they do know that it is not as easy as they originally presume. Critical writing is not merely a report of what others have said on your topic, it is a critique – an evaluation.
- 4. Keep focussed:** While you are writing you will not have a Jeremy Paxman to keep pulling you back to the main point. So, you must take on this role yourself. Before settling on a particular title/question be sure that you are absolutely clear what it is about/asking, and that this is something you want to research. While you are writing, keep going back to your title – perhaps after each paragraph - to make sure that you are still on track. Write your title or question on a post-it note and stick this on the top corner of your screen as a constant reminder not to stray.
- 5. Remain relevant:** Make sure that *everything* you write is relevant to your key concept. To stray is to weaken your writing and negatively impact upon your word count. Aim for narrow and deep, rather than broad and shallow. Within this, if there is any doubt about something's relevance, show just how it is relevant. It is not always easy to determine the relevance of other's writing to your own work, working now on your parameters of how to distinguish what is and is not relevant will hold you in good stead for this and future academic writing.

