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Critical Thinking

Lecture 4: Critical Thinking

Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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Critical Writing Skills 2

Presentation Outline

- What is expected of an assignment?
- How can I plan my research?
- How do I reference?
- What is critical analysis?
- Why is it important?
- How do I apply critical skills to assignments?

What is expected of an assignment?

The aim of writing your essay is to put forward:

- ✓ your own answer to the question, well-researched but showing your own thinking and understanding

As a result, you need to:

- ✓ develop your own argument, based on reading, research and thinking
- ✓ write it clearly supported by relevant sources from the literature

What is expected?

1. _____ the question
2. Do what the _____ and guidelines tell you
3. Make everything _____ to the topic
4. Organise your work _____
5. Use appropriate _____
6. _____ properly and completely
7. Include argument / _____ (reflection)
8. Write in correct, _____ English
9. Present your work _____ and appropriately

relevant
reference
analysis
answer
neatly
formal
sources
logically
title

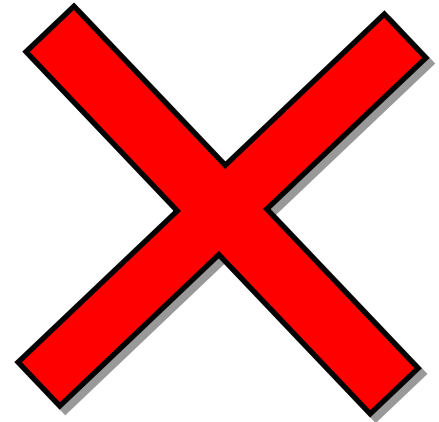
What is expected?

1. Answer the question
2. Do what the title and guidelines tell you
3. Make everything relevant to the topic
4. Organise your work logically
5. Use appropriate sources
6. Reference properly and completely
7. Include argument/analysis (reflection)
8. Write in correct, formal English
9. Present your work neatly and appropriately



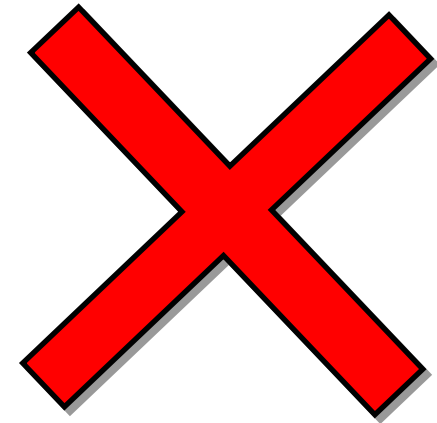
Try to avoid these problems

1. Failure to i_____ the essay title
 - Essay content / approach not relevant
2. Lack of s_____ /c_____
 - Badly organised/ jumps around/doesn't flow/poor paragraphs
3. Lack of a_____
 - Too 'descriptive' or 'narrative'
 - Points not clearly made
4. Lack of s_____ e_____
 - No evidence of research
 - Plagiarism



Try to avoid these problems

1. Failure to interpret the essay title
 - Essay content/approach not relevant
2. Lack of structure/coherence
 - Badly organised/jumps around/doesn't flow/
 - poor paragraphs
3. Lack of analysis
 - Too 'descriptive' or 'narrative'
 - Points not clearly made
4. Lack of supporting evidence
 - No evidence of research
 - Plagiarism



How can I plan my research?

Your whole essay should fit together to answer the question:

- Your **introduction** sets your essay in context, preparing people to read and understand the text
- The **main body** leads people logically, step by step through each point in your answer
- Your **conclusion** pulls them together and sums up the most important things in your answer
- **References**

Introduction

Your introduction should include:

- ✓ A general statement about the topic
- ✓ Context
- ✓ A specific statement
- ✓ The purpose of the essay (or the thesis statement), which should include YOUR main points. For example: it is the purpose of the essay to explore...

Main body

Each developing paragraph should have:

- ✓ A topic sentence
- ✓ Examples to support claims (referencing)*
- ✓ Contrasting sentences (e.g.: however, nevertheless)
- ✓ Concluding sentences (e.g.: to sum up, in brief)

*Referencing:

- Jones (2002) argues that...
- Smith (2006, p.2) states that '...'

Conclusion

The conclusion should:

- ✓ Recall the issues raised in the introduction
- ✓ Summarise the main points of the essay
- ✓ Come to a clear and logical conclusion without introducing any new ideas

INTRODUCTION
(generally
10% of total
word count)

1. General statement about the topic
2. Context
3. Specific statement
4. Purpose of the essay/ thesis statement. For example: It is the purpose of this essay to explore the advantages and disadvantages of...

MAIN BODY

Firstly, before looking at..., it is important to take an overview of...

1. Topic sentence
2. Examples to support claims (with referencing)
3. Contrasting sentence(s)—however, in contrast, nevertheless
4. Concluding sentence—in sum, to sum up, in brief, in other words, in short

Referencing:

Jones (2002) argues that...

Smith (2006, p. 26) states that '...'

CONCLUSION
(generally
10% of total
word count)

To conclude, in conclusion,

1. Recall the issues raised in the introduction
2. Summarise the main points of the essay
3. Come to a clear conclusion without introducing any new topics or ideas

Referencing

Referencing

Citation

You make a **short reference** (author's last name and year of publication) in the **text** of your essay every time you refer to someone else's work.

Reference List

You make a **list at the end** of your essay of **all the sources** you have referred to in your work – you give **complete details**

here including publisher, etc.

The citation acts as a key so that your reader can find the full reference easily on the list of references at the end of your essay.

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Quotations

When you quote, you use the exact words of the author(s) and you put them in quotation marks '...'. You must include the author's last name, the year of publication and the page number.

For example:

In general terms, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) covers 'those educational activities in higher education, the purpose of which is the teaching and learning of the English language required by undergraduates, post-graduates and/ or staff' (Kennedy, 2001, p. 25).

When should you quote?

- When you are using someone's definition
- When you want to discuss exactly what someone said
- When the precise detail of what someone says is important – e.g. a law, policy document
- When someone has phrased something effectively and succinctly

Paraphrasing

You paraphrase when you change the information read into your own words without changing the original meaning.

Why paraphrase?

- It shows that you understand what the writer is saying
- It makes it easier to build your own argument. For example, you can use what someone else says as evidence or an example to support what you want to say
- It fits more easily with your own writing style

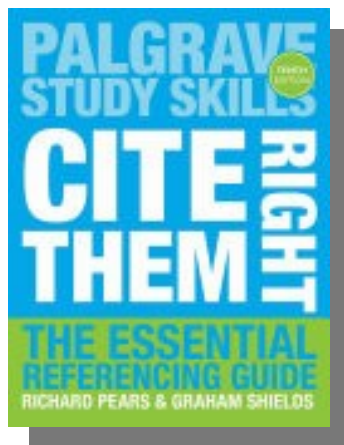
Example:

- **Original quote:** 'Employers who provide childcare at the workplace have found that lateness declines and levels of stress decrease' (Smith, 2012, p. 5).

Harvard style

The way we reference is different for different types of sources (e.g.: books, e-journals etc.).

Use Cite Them Right



Pears, R. and Shields, G. (2019)

Cite them right: the essential guide to referencing and plagiarism. 11th edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Critical Analysis

What is critical analysis?

‘It is a cognitive activity, associated with using the mind. Learning to think in critically analytical and evaluative ways means using mental processes such as attention, categorisation, selection, and judgement’ (Cottrell, 2005, p. 1).

Definitions – issues involved in reading and writing

Critical:

containing detailed judgements of good and bad qualities of something.

Analysis:

the separation of something into its constituent parts to understand what it contains.

Discussion:

a detailed consideration of the ideas relating to a topic.

Argument:

Issues involved in analysis

- Weighing up evidence
- Thinking critically about given terms and definitions
- Seeing links between ideas or between ideas and events
- Expressing your own ideas
- Interpreting information to find its significance
-

Why is critical analysis important?

‘Skills in critical thinking bring precision to the way you think and work’ (Cottrell, 2005, p.4).

Benefits of reading critically

- Improved attention to detail and observation
- Improved ability to question: you shouldn't believe everything you read or hear
- More focused reading
- Improved ability to identify the key points in a text or the message rather than becoming distracted by less important material
- Knowledge of how to get to your own point across more easily
- Identifying trends and patterns
- Looking at the same information from several points of view
- Objectivity
- Considering implications and consequences

Using critical analysis to prepare an assignment

Step 1: explore the question

- Do you understand it?
- Can you rewrite it in your own words?
- What is it asking you to focus upon?
- What are the key debates it refers to?

Exploring the title

There are 3 things to look at:

- Topic/content words or phrases
 - These tell you the main subject of the assignment
- Limiting/focus words
 - These tell you what aspects of the topic to write about
- Direction words
 - These tell you what to do

Discuss the Changing Role of Women in the 20th Century.

1. Topic/content words:

Discuss the changing role of women in the 20th century.

2. Focus/limiting words:

Discuss the changing role of women in the 20th century.

3. Direction word:

Discuss the changing role of women in the 20th century.

Step 1: explore the topic

- What do you already know about the topic? Make some brief notes and summarise your ideas
- What does your current knowledge of this topic contribute to your assessment of this material?
- Have you already undertaken research in this area?
- Think about the issues which surround this topic. Can you identify the key threads?

Step 2: develop your argument

- Your aim is to present your view on this topic; to 'argue' your case via the creation of a clear, strong, coherent argument to support your ideas
- Your argument should underpin your conclusions
- Think about how you will convince your reader of your viewpoint

Step 3: create a convincing argument

Complete the following sentence:

People should be encouraged to smoke because...

Did you find this difficult? Perhaps you have particular principles or feelings that influenced your ability to respond to the task? Here are some reasons you could have given:

- **smoking lowers the cost of geriatric care because smokers tend to die younger than non-smokers**
- **smokers generate employment in the tobacco industry**
- **smoking raises taxes**
- **smoking saves on pension payments because smokers tend to die younger than non-smokers**

Looking at this list, were you itching to argue against some of them? If so, you can see how valuable this is in stimulating thinking! This activity will help you appreciate that we can consider other points of view, even if we do not agree with them (adapted from The Open University, 2013).

Step 4: use evidence to support your viewpoint

- Having explored the literature, show what evidence is available
- Assess its strengths and weaknesses
- Consider current theories
- Identify areas of debate/disagreement
- Are there discussions/debates/theories which are not in accord with your viewpoint?
- Consider the evidence that they are based on. Is it convincing?

Step 5: Present your argument in a clear and coherent way

- Structure your argument by moving from point to point
- It has to be logical, clear, coherent, working towards the conclusion
- Think about the most logical way of presenting the discussion
- Visualise your argument as a series of stepping stones laid out clearly on a path towards your conclusion which should be logical based on clear reasoning well supported by evidence.

Step 6: Academic writing

- When putting your discussion together, try to avoid presenting a list of evidence (who says what)
- Formulate and articulate your views of current ideas/arguments. Can you evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments?
- Explore and suggest the limitations of studies
- Show how material links

Use the following checklist to analyse a piece of writing that you need to read for an assignment. You could also use this list to analyse your own writing.

Critical questions	Analysis of the writing
What is the main line of reasoning (the main argument)?	
Is the line of reasoning clear both in the introduction and in the conclusion?	
What is the key evidence used to support the line of argument? Is the evidence presented in a way that develops the argument and leads clearly to the conclusion?	
When was the evidence produced? Is it up to date? Is it still relevant?	
Is there sufficient evidence to prove the case? Is the evidence relevant? What might be missing?	
What (if any) would have been a better order in which to present the evidence so as to strengthen the line of reasoning?	
Are there any examples of flawed reasoning? Attempts to persuade the reader through an appeal to the emotions? Is evidence interpreted and used correctly?	
Has the writer given sufficient consideration to alternative points of view? Give examples.	

To sum up,

- The development of critical and analytical thinking and writing skills is an important aspect of studying in higher education
- When learning about and exploring new ideas, issues, theories and texts, it is important not to accept everything without first questioning it
- This means using critical and analytical thinking skills to assess information and ideas which are new to you

References

Cottrell, S. (2003) *The Study Skills Handbook*.
Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Cottrell, S. (2005) *Critical Thinking Skills*.
Basingstoke: Palgrave.