

LCHS4001 Essay Sample – Acceptable version

(Note for lecturers: will be unhidden on Moodle at the end of Week 6 but feel free to give/send your group a copy after the class activity)

Essay question: Explain how academic skills are useful when working in health and social care. (600 words)

Academic skills have often been considered as different to employability skills. In this essay, I will discuss how they overlap by considering three examples. I will argue that skills in research, writing and critical thinking mean that better care can be provided to service users. I will take each of these skills in turn, discussing what they involve and how they apply to a health and social care context.

Research skills include finding, evaluating, processing and organising information. Research skills are academic skills because instead of relying on opinions obtained randomly, academic research involves thinking carefully about the quality and content of the information needed, using systematic methods to find it and applying effective strategies to understand and manage a large quantity (Cottrell, 2019). These stages of the research process are similar to those used in health and social care, whether gathering and using information about an individual service user or keeping up to date as a professional in order to provide evidence-based care (Craig, 2009). Sometimes, social care workers lack confidence in research skills because they have not been trained in them when studying for their qualifications (Pulman and Fenge, 2024). Viewing these skills as necessary for both study and work may address this problem, however related skills must also be strengthened, such as being able to communicate and write effectively.

Writing effectively involves producing a clear, well-organised piece of work that is relevant to the specific task or audience. Learning academic writing means learning to use a structure, including an introduction, main body and conclusion, whether writing an essay, report or piece of reflective writing (Day, 2023). In addition, writing skills are now viewed as core skills for healthcare professionals because it is often necessary to communicate effectively in writing, such as to inform colleagues about new procedures or justify why more resources are needed to address a specific need (Bell and Murray, 2021). However, writing is not just about the final communication but is also a useful process because it helps writers to think about what they want to say through drafting and redrafting (Cottrell, 2019). This process can also help people to think critically.

Critical thinking can be understood as asking questions. It can also be understood as a complex process involving many other skills, such as evaluating and weighing up evidence, that help us identify and challenge assumptions (Cottrell, 2023). Importantly for service users, critical thinking also involves being critical of our own values, beliefs and attitudes so that we can challenge our own assumptions and make better decisions for the benefit of the people in our care (Aveyard, Sharp and Woolliams, 2015). In addition, thinking skills help with applying academic skills to different tasks in another context, such as work (Cottrell,

2021). Critical thinking is therefore fundamental to the successful use of other academic skills.

In this essay, I have suggested that developing academic skills, such as research, writing and critical thinking skills, prepares future health and social care professionals for some of the tasks they will need to undertake in employment. Any individual worker is part of a complex system that is facing challenges due to changes in the population, major health conditions, inequalities, the distribution of resources and technologies including the availability of vast quantities of information. Developing skills in managing and using some of that information will enable professionals to do their best for people needing care.

References

Aveyard, H., Sharp, P. and Woolliams, M. (2015) *A Beginner's Guide to Critical Thinking and Writing in Health and Social Care*. 2nd edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Bell, M. and Murray, R. (2021) 'Structured academic writing retreats in healthcare professional practice', *The Clinical Teacher*, (18), pp. 243–246. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/tct.13287>.

Cottrell, S. (2019) *The Study Skills Handbook*. 5th edn. London: Red Globe Press.

Cottrell, S. (2021) *Skills for Success: Personal Development and Employability*. 4th edn. London: Red Globe Press.

Cottrell, S. (2023) *Critical thinking skills: effective analysis, argument and reflection*. 4th edn. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Craig, C. (2009) *Study Skills for Health and Social Care Students*. London: SAGE.

Day, T. (2023) *Success in Academic Writing*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Pulman, A. and Fenge, L. (2024) 'Building capacity for social care research – ways of improving research skills for social workers', *Social Work Education*, 43(1), pp. 60-78. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2023.2221276>.