

THE FOUR As

Analyse • Agree • Argue • Arrive

The **Four A's** is a simple framework for developing critical thinking and turning research into a reasoned academic argument. Although originally developed to support academic writing, the same process can be applied to professional problem-solving, strategic thinking and decision-making.

The aim is to move beyond simply **describing what you know**. Strong academic work demonstrates what you can **do with that knowledge**.

1. ANALYSE

What is going on?

Start by establishing and interrogating the issue, idea, theory or organisation you are examining.

Ask yourself:

What is happening? Why might it be happening? What are the important factors, relationships or patterns? What evidence do I have?

Description is often the starting point of analysis - you may need to explain a theory, model or situation before discussing it - but **don't stop at description**.

Think: *What do I know, and what does it tell me?*

2. AGREE

Where is there convergence?

Now bring other evidence and perspectives into the discussion.

Look for **similarities, supporting evidence and common themes**. Do different researchers reach similar conclusions? Do several theories share characteristics? Have other organisations experienced something comparable?

Rather than discussing every source separately, begin to **synthesise** them:

Several studies suggest...

Similarly...

This is supported by...

Both perspectives identify...

Think: *Who or what supports this, and where does the evidence point in the same direction?*

3. ARGUE

What challenges this?

Critical thinking requires you to consider credible alternatives - **even when you agree with the original argument.**

Look for contradictions, limitations, different interpretations and competing evidence.

Useful prompts include:

However...

In contrast...

An alternative perspective is...

This argument may be limited by...

Argue does not mean disagree for the sake of it. It means stress-testing the position.

Think: *What if this isn't the whole story?*

Always question the narrative - even if you believe it yourself.

4. ARRIVE

Given all of this, what can I reasonably conclude?

This is where you exercise **judgement**.

Having analysed the issue, considered supporting evidence and tested it against alternatives, what is the most convincing conclusion **in this context?**

Explain **why**.

In a business report, this may lead directly to a recommendation. In an essay, it may be your reasoned position. When choosing between theories or models, explain why one is more appropriate than the alternatives.

Think: *So what? What does the evidence ultimately lead me to conclude or recommend?*

The Four A's are NOT four separate sections of a purely linear process

Although the model is presented as **Analyse, Agree, Argue, Arrive**, these are not four separate stages that you simply complete in order.

Analyse provides the foundation by establishing and interrogating what you are examining, while **Arrive** represents the judgement, conclusion or recommendation that your thinking ultimately leads towards.

Agree and Argue, however, should be interwoven throughout. As your thinking develops, continually look for evidence and perspectives that support one another (**Agree**) and those that challenge, contradict or offer credible alternatives (**Argue**).

Think of it less as:

Analyse → Agree → Argue → Arrive

and more as:

Analyse → [Agree ↔ Argue ↔ Agree ↔ Argue] → Arrive

You may also reach smaller judgements along the way before analysing the next issue and repeating the process.

This applies whether you are developing an **essay, report, presentation, academic interview, business case or professional recommendation**.

The Four A's are not a formula for structuring your work — they are a framework for strengthening the thinking within it.

Before you submit, ask yourself...

ANALYSE - Have I gone beyond simply describing the topic?

AGREE - Have I identified evidence, literature or perspectives that support or reinforce one another?

ARGUE - Have I genuinely challenged the argument and considered alternatives or limitations?

ARRIVE - Have I made my own justified judgement rather than simply repeating what other people have said?

And throughout:

Are my claims supported by credible evidence?

References aren't academic decoration. Use sources to **provide evidence, support ideas, challenge arguments and help you reach justified conclusions**.

In four questions

ANALYSE → *What is going on?*

AGREE → *Where is there convergence?*

ARGUE → *What challenges this?*

ARRIVE → *Given all of that, what can I reasonably conclude?*

Research → Reasoning → Judgement

Analyse. Agree. Argue. Arrive.