

Writing a Critical Review

- Critical thinking is a vital skill for a Psychology student
 - Not just 'slating' an article
 - Highlight the positive too
 - Present negative points in a constructive and professional way
 - Imagine you're reviewing papers for a journal – a paper has faults which you need to point out, but you also need to say *how* it could be better...
 - You have to leave the author with the will to carry on!!
 - Also remember that if the paper is published in a peer reviewed experts' have agreed that the paper is good enough to be published. It doesn't mean it's perfect necessarily but does mean that it isn't hopeless!!
 - But also, some journals are better than others and more reputable ones have higher standards.

- Are the researchers over-stating their results?
- What aren't they telling you?
 - e.g., how many people dropped out of their study and why?
- Is there another explanation for the results they've found?
 - e.g., confounding variables not measured
- So what?
 - Why should we care about this research?
 - What does it actually contribute to our knowledge or to improving anything for anybody in the real world?
 - How might it contribute in the future?
- Could you do it better?
 - Think of sensible alternatives for methods, analyses
 - Think of alternative explanations for the results

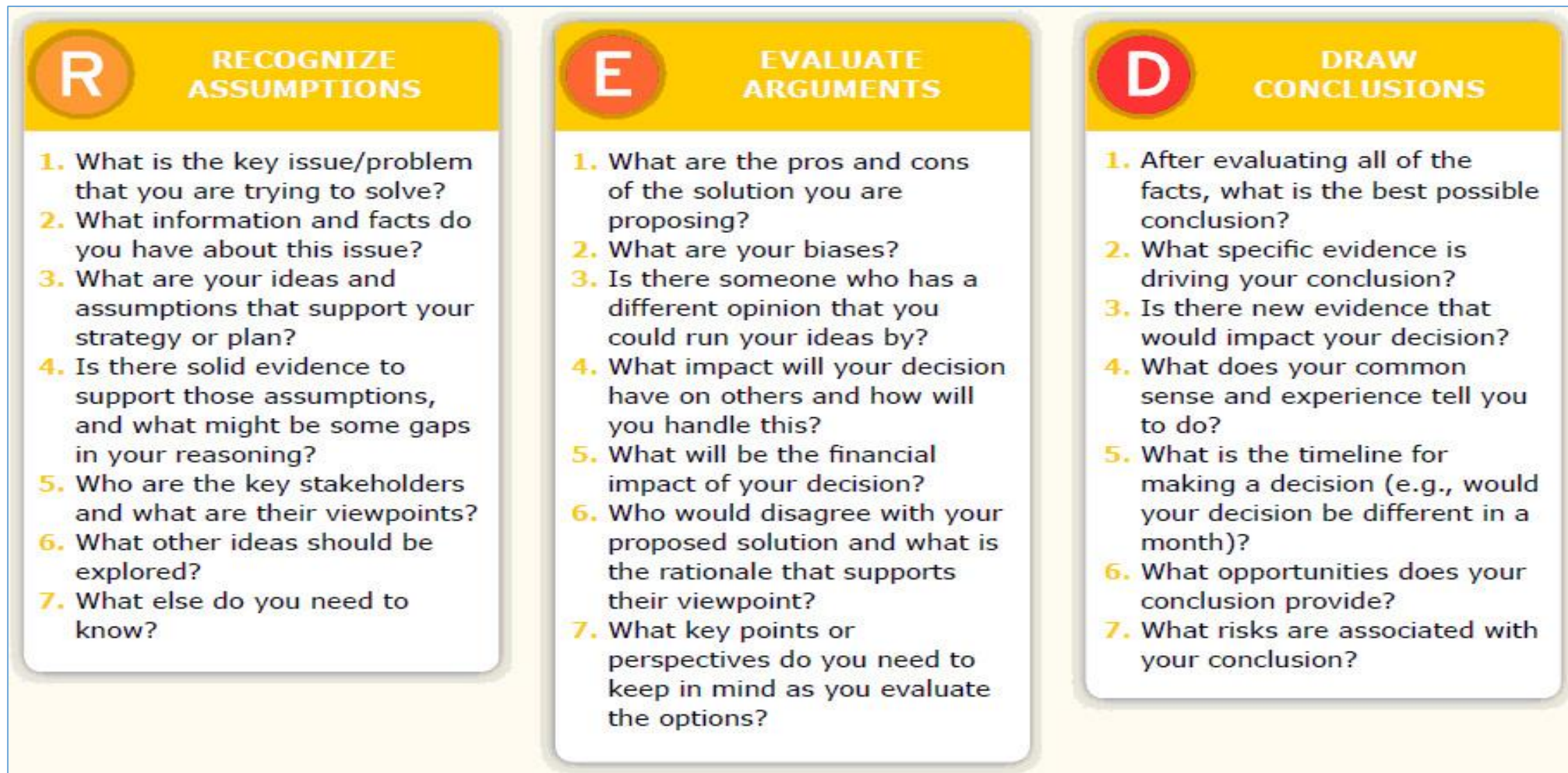
So... how can you start to write critically?

- Read the article over several times: it will not always make sense the first time!
- Get a feel for the content overall and then start breaking down each section.

- A simple model



A more complex model:



Your question:

- `Using one key text as your main source, conduct a critical review of the causal explanations of criminal behaviour` (3,000 words).
 - In addition to critiquing the paper, you need to select other explanations for criminal behaviour which contradict, support and enhance your chosen paper.
- Evaluate the implications of each explanation; think of the wider picture in terms of moral and ethical considerations, rehabilitation potential and generalisability across types of crime.

Critically reviewing...

- Questions to ask when critically evaluating a research paper:
 - What can I learn from this paper
 - What are the limits of this paper
 - Bias
 - What can I learn from the method that has been used?
 - What can I learn from this paper, about the topic as a whole?
 - What is the 'value' of the paper?
 - What does it add to my/our stock of knowledge?
 - How can I get the knowledge claims of the paper into some kind of perspective?
 - What are the aspects of the paper that may be ambiguous and open to different interpretations, and point toward a need for further research?

Online tips for writing a review

- <https://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/get-assistance/writing/specific-types-papers/using-scientific-journal-article-write-critical-review>
- When you have found your article, you may want to check with me that it is appropriate for use. Using a meta-analysis or systematic review is not acceptable.
- Good luck!