

Reflective points when putting together your study

1. Purpose: What do you intend to address in the study?

It can be helpful to list some 'concepts' that you will use in this project. A concept is something that can have more than one interpretation; the word Counselling itself is a good example of a concept, as there are many different ideas of what Counselling is. If you spend some time with these concepts and come to your own definition with the help of other sources it can act as a good way into your project. Concepts are the ideas, facts, values and beliefs that we refer to when engaging in academic work – it is crucial to have a full understanding of the concepts that you will use in your work to be able to describe them as fully as possible. This task is important at this stage because the understanding and description of the concepts will demonstrate your wider understanding of possible different interpretations and competing claims of knowledge, which can help to form your critical stance.

2. What questions are you raising?

The purpose of the project is to ask a question about a particular area within the field of Counselling which interests you. However, the task is not to choose a topic that you 'like' and think is 'wonderful' and want to say wonderful things about it, because this will not have a critical edge. The trick is to ask the question: Why is this as it is? How could this be different? Does someone say something different? What evidence is there for this idea/theory/policy, these politics? Who said it should be like this?

An example of this from a recent Independent Project was where the student critiqued the Welsh Government initiative of School-based Counselling from the perspective of an education support worker, arguing that the role also had a significant 'counselling' element, which raised and addressed a question regarding the definition of Counselling and its legitimacy within support roles in work outside the Counselling environment. The argument was very well put forward and a convincing case was made.

Is there anything you want to challenge and put forward an alternative argument for? The secret of a good critique is that it is balanced and fair, yet puts forward sufficient evidence for the claim you are making.

3. Assumptions? Are there any assumptions that you are making in the work?

Often when we feel interested and engaged in a topic, we can get drawn into the 'rightness' of our own position. It is a very skillful task within critical writing to be able to stand back from what can be a 'blinkered' way of seeing something. To do this it can help if we 'self-position', to declare where our own ideas, judgments and values about a particular concept come from. This often helps us to see that there might be another position that has legitimacy and needs also to be acknowledged – we don't have to agree, but we need to acknowledge other positions or perspectives. You need to demonstrate the ability to recognise and to 'think outside your own box'. By exploring your own positioning, it may help you to recognise when you come across assumptions in other authors' works. They may be basing their arguments on ideas that have not been fully explored, or things that are taken for granted and assumed.

4. Information: What are your sources of information?

Remember that your sources need to demonstrate a breadth of engagement, including the context of the theme, those who 'support' and those who 'challenge' the theme you have chosen. Sources based on authoritative texts and texts written from an evidence base are expected. Do not use websites that do not use authorities in the field or texts that have not been peer reviewed as journal articles. Demonstrate that you understand and can use the academic weight of peer-reviewed journals.

5. Inferences and Conclusions:

What at this stage might be the idea(s) that the work is leading to and any conclusions that might be emerging?

The conclusion is a significant part of your final piece. Students lose a significant amount of marks by not fully addressing the conclusion. The conclusion rounds up the work and tells the

6. Implications and Consequences: What might be the implications and consequences of the above?

The most skillful work then moves from a conclusion to further stretch the work and project into the future. The 'So what?' question. What might be the implications and consequences of the conclusion that you might be coming to? This understanding comes from the idea that all knowledge and ideas have consequences and implications: knowledge is not a neutral value according to critical thinking.