

# Critical Analysis - What to Consider

**Definition** (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>)

**critical** (GIVING OPINIONS)

adjective

giving opinions or judgements on books, plays, films, etc:

*She has written a major critical appraisal/study of Saul Bellow's novels.*

*His last film **won/received** critical **acclaim** (= was praised by film critics).*

**critically**

adverb

*a critically **acclaimed** TV series*

**critical** (NOT PLEASED)

adjective

saying that someone or something is bad or wrong:

*a critical report*

*The report is **highly** critical **of** safety standards at the factory.*

**critical** (IMPORTANT)

adjective

of the greatest importance to the way things might happen:

*The President's support is critical (**to** this project).*

*a critical decision*

**critical** (SERIOUS) [Show phonetics]

adjective

extremely serious or dangerous:

*Both drivers are critical/in a critical **condition** (= so badly hurt that they might die) after the 120mph crash.*

It will be helpful to consider the following guidance:

- in relation to any published information you use, whatever the format (eg *written, oral, visual, electronic*)
- in relation to any information you yourself have collected (eg *from surveys, interviews, experiments, field work etc*) - in which case substitute 'I' for 'they' in the following
- with a short piece of written work (eg *a report, an article etc*) in front of you - to give you practice at using the skills.

## Critical Analysis in Academic Research

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| <b>What is 'critical analysis'?</b>                                                | To analyse is to break the information into its elements.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>What does 'analyse information critically' mean in academic work?</b>           | 'Critical analysis' is making careful judgements about and evaluating the quality of those elements.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>What is not 'critical analysis'?</b>                                            | It is not:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Looking at what is not critical analysis may help to make clear what it is.</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making assumptions without checking them out</li> <li>• making generalisations which are not supported by evidence</li> <li>• accepting information without questioning it</li> <li>• giving information which has mistakes in it or is misleading</li> <li>• a straight description</li> <li>• saying "this writer says this, that writer says that" without giving your views on the differences between what the two writers say.</li> </ul> |

### Clarifying your task

|                                            |                                                                                                                                                            |
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| <b>Clarifying assignment instructions.</b> | What do your assignment instructions mean? What is expected?                                                                                               |
| <b>Start by analysing your task.</b>       | It helps to: break the task down into its elements; use dictionaries to see exactly what the assignment means; rewrite the instructions in your own words. |

### Evidence, opinions and claims

|                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
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| <b>Material should include evidence for what it claims.</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there evidence for the ideas/opinions/claims in the information?</li> <li>• What proof is there? How do those holding the opinion or making a claim know their views are correct?</li> <li>• Would somebody with an opposing view or who knew nothing about the topic find the evidence convincing?</li> <li>• How much evidence is needed to prove the point?</li> </ul> |
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## Critical Analysis in Academic Research

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| <p><b>Opinions.</b></p>                                                                 | <p>An opinion is an idea for which there is no proof or evidence. In academic work it is bad practice to give an opinion without proof (unless you clearly state it is an opinion only). It is particularly important to spot opinions without proof if they are central to an argument.</p> <p>Within a subject area, certain ideas may be so well accepted by those working in the subject area that they are seen as 'truths' and it is not seen as necessary to keep repeating the evidence. It may take quite a lot of experience in a subject area before you know what these 'truths' are. Until you get to that point, it may be safer to always check that there is proof or evidence for ideas.</p> |
| <p><b>Claims.</b></p> <p><b>Also see the section below about academic argument.</b></p> | <p>A claim is a statement of something you believe or something you have discovered (eg a <i>hypothesis</i> is an example of a claim). It needs to be supported by evidence or proof. If it isn't supported by evidence or proof it becomes just an opinion.</p> <p>In a piece of work the proof or evidence may not always be next to the claim. An initial claim may be made and the proof or evidence may appear later in the work.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

### Questioning the information

|                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| <p><b>Accuracy, completeness, currency.</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the information accurate?</li> <li>• Is it complete? What further information is needed?</li> <li>• Is it up to date?</li> <li>• Is the source of the information reliable or reputable? Can you trust what they say?</li> <li>• Might the source of the evidence be biased? Have they got a vested interest?</li> <li>• Is the evidence believable?</li> </ul> |
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## Critical Analysis in Academic Research

**Questioning, and checking for assumptions.**

**To assume something is to accept it without proof.**

- Why do those giving the ideas/opinions/claims think what they do?
- Is it necessarily so? Could there be reasons other than the ones they suggest?
- Are the ideas/opinions/claims based on a set of values or attitudes? What are those values/attitudes? Do the values/attitudes relate to a specific culture or group (eg *ethnic grouping, social class, men/women etc*)? Would the ideas/opinions/claims look different with different values/attitudes?
- Have you accepted the ideas/opinions/claims because they confirm what you think, rather than because there is good evidence for them?
- Are there other situations where the ideas/opinions/claims should also apply and do they? What exceptions might there be?

What reasons might there be for mistakes or distorted information:

- the perceptions of those producing the information (eg *over positive or over negative views*);
- how those producing the information made their judgements (eg *irrelevant criteria, stereotyping, oversimplifying*);
- the reactions of those producing the information to the topic (eg *attacking individuals, explaining away*)? (Ruggiero, 1996 pp84-94).

**Interpreting information.**

Once you have analysed information you need to give your own interpretation of it. In the following 'relate to' means making links between (or looking at) what is the same or different.

What you do may vary with the type of information (eg *factual information, theories, creative work*). Giving your own interpretation includes using your critical analysis to:

- look at what the information means and make sense of it (eg *identify the essential elements etc*)
- identify which parts of the information you agree or disagree with and why (making judgements)
- relate the information to your topic
- relate the information to any original research you have done (eg *surveys, experiments etc*)
- relate the information to your own experience
- relate the information to any other evidence you have
- draw conclusions.

### Comparing information

#### Making connections.

- How does what one author/source says compare with what other authors/sources say? Are they similar/different? How?
- Do most authors agree? If one disagrees with the rest, how, what are her/his views based on (eg *new information; different values or perceptions*)?
- What do other authors/sources say about one particular author/source?
- Which author/source do you agree with? Why? What is the evidence or proof for what you think?

### Academic argument

#### What is an 'argument', used in an academic sense?

Putting forward a line of reasoning.

Arguments usually consist of claims for which evidence is given, and which are put in the best order (organised) to persuade the reader or listener to agree.

#### Understanding an argument.

- What is the main point/claim being made?
- What is the evidence for that point/claim?
- What subsidiary points/claims are being made?
- Do they connect logically with the main point/claim?
- Have any steps/information/evidence been missed out of the argument?

#### Making your argument.

- What main point/claim do you want to make?
- What other points/claims will contribute to it?
- What is the best order for the points/claims?
- Have you given evidence for them?
- Is the evidence clearly linked to the point/claim, does it follow logically from it?
- Have you shown how your points/claims are linked?
- Have you included information/points/claims not relevant to your main point/claim? Could you remove it/them?
- Do your conclusions follow from your points/evidence/claims?
- Have you made your own judgement about the topic or information? Is it based on evidence?

### Presenting your information

#### Presenting your information.

- Have you given the sources for your information/evidence?
- Could the reader/user find your information/evidence?
- Have you used an acceptable way of referencing it?
- Does the way you present your information help the reader/user to understand it?