

Critical thinking
and approaches to
assessment at Master's level

Academic Levels

Level	What does it look like?
Level 4	Description • Opinion and research findings used to illustrate points but taken 'at face value' • Theories and experiences described
Level 5	Discussion • Compare and contrast different research findings, opinions and experiences
Level 6	Critical analysis • View different research findings, opinions and experiences critically • Emphasis on importance of 'good' evidence as a basis for drawing conclusions
Level 7	Critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation • In depth critical analysis of research findings, opinions and experiences used to construct an argument • Justifying a particular viewpoint or conclusion as a result of 'weighing up' the evidence

Descriptive qualities		Critical qualities
<i>Lists in any order</i>	<i>---X-----</i>	<i>Structures information in order (e.g. of importance)</i>
Stating what happened	-----	Identifying the significance
Stating what something is like	-----	Evaluating (judges the value) strengths and weaknesses
Noting the method used	-----	Indicating whether something is suitable or not
Listing details	-----	Evaluating the relative significance of details
Stating information	-----	Drawing conclusions
Listing information in any order	-----	Structuring information in a logical order
Stating links between items	-----	Showing the relevance of links between items
Stating when something happened	-----	Identifying why timing is important
Stating the different components	-----	Judging the importance of the components
Stating options	-----	Evaluating the options and stating which should be selected

Differences between MSc and Undergrad

Critical reading

As you read your module materials follow these three steps.

Analyse - Examine how key components within your module materials fit together and relate to each other.

Compare - Explore the similarities and differences between the ideas you are reading about. Do some ideas conflict with or complement each other?

Synthesise - Bring together different sources of information to serve an argument or idea you are constructing. Make logical connections between the different sources that help you shape and support your ideas. Are there any inferences you can draw from the material and apply to an assignment question?

Critical Thinking - Analysis

- ‘Detailed examination of elements’
- Critiquing different viewpoints – other people’s positions, arguments and conclusions
- Evaluating the reliability and validity of the literature/evidence
- Viewing everything you read critically – not taking anything at face value
- Weighing up opposing arguments
- Structured reflection on personal experience

Critical Thinking - Synthesis

- Combining elements into a whole
- Drawing conclusions about whether arguments put forward are valid, evidence based and justifiable
- Consider whether arguments are realistic
- Deciding based on the argument, the evidence and the practice context what your point of view is or what you will recommend
- Present your point of view in a clear, well reasoned way *with justification*

Characteristics of an Argument

- **Position** – author has a position that they want the audience to accept (may or may not be stated at the beginning)
- **Reasons** (propositions) are given to support (justify) the author's position
- **Line of reasoning** is the logical 'unpacking' of the reasons why 'on balance', considering everything, this argument (viewpoint) is justifiable
- **Conclusions** – not just a summary of the essay but makes the author's position clear. You will often have several smaller arguments/conclusions, leading to one overall conclusion

What is Good Evidence?

- Contemporary research evidence – valid and reliable
- Seminal research evidence
- Published in peer reviewed journals
- Primary research as opposed to secondary citation
- But don't overlook the value of other forms of evidence.....

Evidence is more than research....

- Expert opinion – so some ‘opinion pieces’ may be ‘good evidence
- Patient/client/carer perspectives
- Own professional/personal experiences?

Barriers to Critical Thinking

- Reluctance to critique experts
- Mistaking critical analysis for 'just commenting on the bad points'
- Assuming teachers and experts always 'have the answers'. Critical thinking means pursuing your own answers.
- Our own assumptions, preconceptions, biases, experiences, beliefs etc.