



# A guide to critical reading

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## Other related Study Hub guides in the critical thinking series include:

- Evaluating a source
- A guide to critical reading
- Themed notes method
- Showing analysis and evaluation in your writing
- Constructing an argument
- A guide to developing an argument map
- A guide to synthesis
- A guide to critical writing

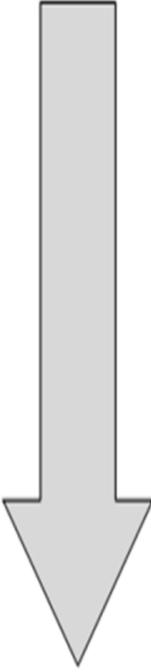
## Introduction

It is not enough just to find the right material for an assignment, degree level study requires you to think critically about what you read and apply your knowledge in a systematic and objective way. You need to examine your sources by asking questions and considering a range of alternative views to the topic rather than just accepting what you have read or have been taught. This process is required so that you can develop your own evidence-based understanding of the topic being studied and use your own academic voice when presenting these insights within assignments. Reading widely is essential when developing your own academic voice and presenting evidence to support the argument. When reading, look for the following; clarity, accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, logic, significance and fairness.

To sum up, reading critically starts with the reading you select. Once you have selected the most relevant sources that meet your criteria, begin to question the literature as you go along. Develop a set of notes that summarise the findings and go on to identify how the findings fit together with other sources. Finally, analyse the methodology used in research articles and consider the origins of sources (e.g. government papers) as this allows you to comment on the reliability and bias of the findings.

(adapted from: University of Huddersfield, no date).

### Steps to critical thinking

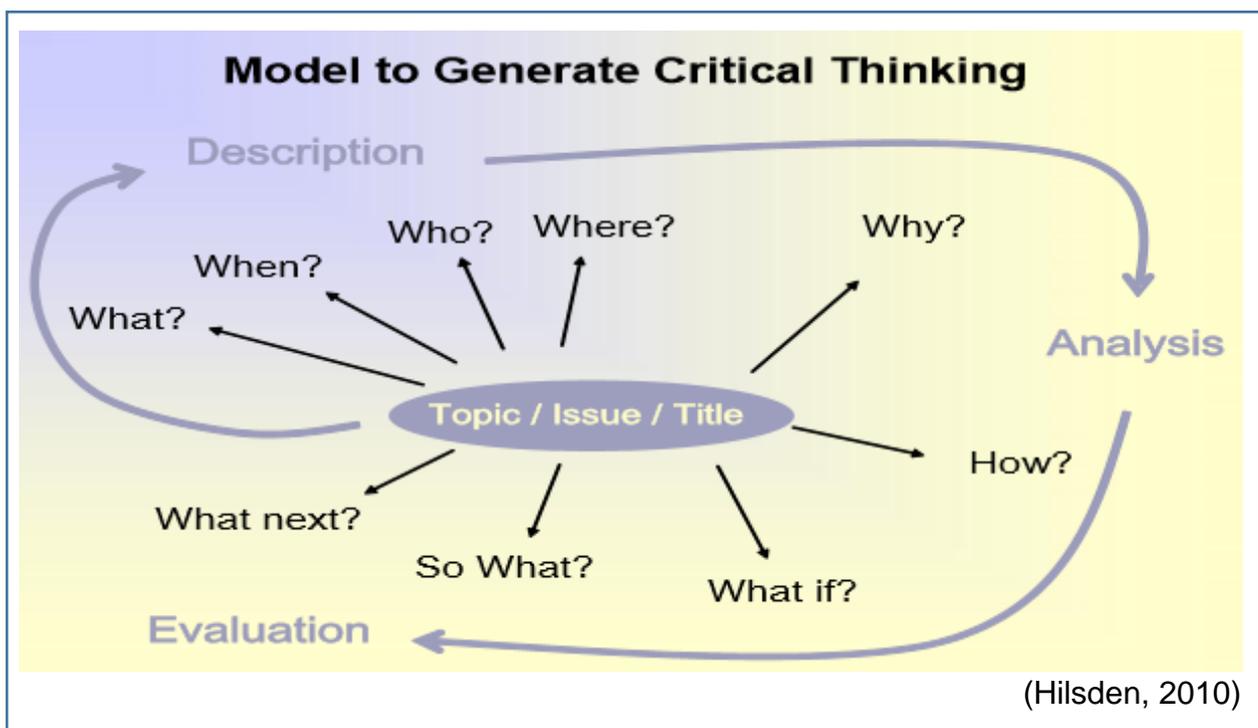
<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Low level critical thinking</p>  <p>High level critical thinking</p> </div>	<p><b>level 4 / 5</b> (first and second year of an undergraduate course)</p>	<b>process</b>	Take in information, i.e. what you have read, seen, heard or done.
		<b>understand</b>	Comprehend key points, assumptions, arguments and evidence being presented.
		<b>analysis</b>	Examine how key components are linked and relate to each other.
		<b>compare</b>	Explore differences and similarities between the ideas you are reading about.
		<b>Synthesis</b>	Bring together a range of sources to that have shaped and support your ideas and the argument you are presenting.
	<p><b>Level 5 / 6 / 7</b> (second and third year of an undergraduate course and masters level)</p>	<b>evaluate</b>	Assess the relevance of the evidence in your own context and show links to other related ideas.
		<b>apply</b>	Apply the understanding you have gained from critical evaluation and use it in response to assignments and practice.
		<b>justify</b>	Develop arguments, draw conclusions, make inferences and identify implications.

(adapted from: The Open University, 2013; cited in Williams, 2014)

**Reading critically:** Reading critically requires you to read and question a selection of different types of literature and cite them within assignments. See the list below for some examples of suitable literature:

- research papers
- policy documents
- applicable theories or models
- professional or industry standards
- professional guidelines
- government and non-government reports
- textbooks
- approved websites
- trade publications
- legislation

**Model to generate critical note-taking:** This model can be used to help you make structured notes that both summarise and question the text, prompting the start of your critical thinking.



**By using a selection of the following questions when examining the literature you will be able to develop higher-level critical thinking when making notes.**

- Is the author accurate in what he/she says (you will need to compare with other literature in order to determine this)?
- Is the author sufficiently precise in providing relevant details including limitations or gaps in the literature?
- Does the author compare similar and opposing views?
- Is the writing in depth or do they take a superficial approach?
- Is the author's view narrow or are broader views from other perspectives considered including literature from other fields of study?
- Where does the author refer to theory, models, research policy or practice examples?
- Are there re-occurring themes within the literature?
- Where does the author synthesise significant themes?
- Is the text consistent or are the arguments illogical?
- Does the author clearly state what their position is (look for the scholarly voice)?
- Does the author consider the significance of the findings (evaluation)?

(adapted from: Wason and Southall, 2016)

### **Further information**

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as online resources, workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit: [lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub](http://lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub)



## References

Hilsden, J. (2010) 'Critical Thinking', *Learning Development*, Available at: [https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/1/1713/Model\\_To\\_Generate\\_Critical\\_Thinking.pdf](https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/1/1713/Model_To_Generate_Critical_Thinking.pdf) (Accessed: 12 March 2014)

University of Huddersfield (no date) *Academic skills: Critical Thinking* Available at: <http://mhm.hud.ac.uk/academic-skills/criticalthinking.html> (Accessed: 23 May 2017)

Wason, H. and Southall, J. (2016) *Critical Thinking Skills Toolkit Student Guide* [unpublished] (Available from: Kingston University)

Williams, K. (2014) *Getting Critical*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan