



## Showing analysis and evaluation in your writing

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- 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

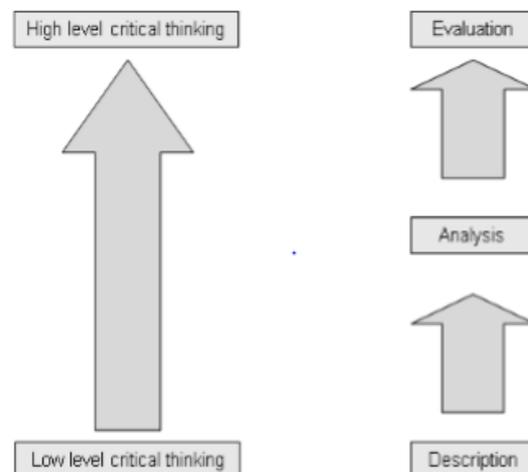
### Introduction

Being critical in academic life does not mean being negative or criticising information just for the sake of it. Critical thinking is an attempt to ask and answer questions in a systematic way. It means not accepting things at face value. More importantly it relies on looking at the evidence and reasons for things before believing something to be 'true'. Critical thinking is a core skill that you will develop and refine throughout your time at university. Being able to think critically and to translate this into your academic writing is one sure way of getting good academic grades.

### Why is it important?

Critical thinking and critical academic writing follows an identifiable pattern and moves from description to analysis to evaluation, usually in that order.

As shown in this diagram:



The following is based on work from Learning Development (2010):

## Description

- Description is always necessary in academic writing
- Description allows the issue or problem under consideration to be contextualised, specific terms to be defined and important points to be developed
- More complex description moves on to become analysis
- By using systematic questions such as – what/ when/where/who/ why - allow the issues/topics/problems to be considered from every aspect

## Analysis

- Where things are examined and explanations given of how parts fit into the whole; where reasons are given, comparisons and contrasts are made and relationships understood
- You can look at alternative responses here as well
- The questions that help you to critically analyse issues/topics/problems here are – how? and what if?

## Evaluation

- Where you make a judgement about something either in terms of its success or failure, or value, or the wider implications
- The questions that need to ask and answer here are – so what? and what if?
- Evaluation leads naturally to conclusions or recommendations and is therefore usually found at the end of academic writing.

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## Critical thinking whilst writing an assignment

Below are some suggested ways to approach reading around and writing a critical essay/assignment. Not all of the critical thinking and writing questions suggested below will be applicable to all assignment titles; you will need to decide what questions are appropriate to use in order to answer your specific assignment title. Similarly, you may wish to extend or develop some of the critical questions further for the purpose of your assignment title.

### Starting the assignment

Starting assignments in good time allow you sufficient time to research the information you need and gives you time to critically read that information. Having done this you can then start thinking critically about the assignment and planning it. Here are some questions to consider when starting:

- Examine the title of the assignment carefully
- What is it asking you to do?
- If it is a statement or question that asks you to critically discuss/evaluate that statement or question do you agree with it? Why?
- Do you disagree with it? Why?

- Do you not know enough about it to form an opinion at this stage? If so, do some reading and research around the assignment area and then decide whether you agree or disagree with the statement
- The important thing to remember is do you have/or can you find the evidence (research, theories, models, concepts etc.) from the literature to support the stance you will take in the assignment?

### Planning the assignment

It is important to plan your assignment before you actually start writing it. There are a number of benefits linked to creating a plan:

- Planning your work helps you address the assignment question and to structure your thoughts into a logical sequence.
- Planning also allows you time to think carefully and critically about the way you will answer the assignment question.
- If you have thought about the assignment question carefully then you are more likely to write a well-structured and well-argued assignment.
- Planning will also help guide your research around the assignment title and avoid you becoming swamped with too much or irrelevant material.
- You need to **write your plan down** once you are clear about how you are going to answer the assignment question.
- You can write your plan down before you start your research for the assignment question but you may then need to alter or readjust your plan once you've finished your research.
- Most importantly **stick to your plan** once you have finalised it when writing your assignment.

## Writing the assignment introduction

Your **introduction** should attempt to set out how you will address the title. It should **contextualise** the problem/issue under consideration. This section of your assignment will be mostly **description**.

To begin to engage in critical discussion some useful questions to ask and address here are:

<b>What</b>	....is the problem or issue?
<b>Who</b>	....is it a problem/issue for?
<b>When</b>	....is/was it a problem or issue/?
<b>Where</b>	....is the problem/issue occurring or has occurred? ....might it occur in the future?
<b>Why</b>	....is this a problem? Reasons/explanations

## Writing the assignment main body

The **main body** of the assignment is where the issues outlined in the introduction are expanded on and this more complex description moves on to become **analysis and evaluation**.

Here you will examine things in detail and give explanations of how parts relate to the whole. You may make contrasts and comparisons and state how significant they are or what their significance is. You may also look at alternative responses to the problem/issue here as well.

Questions to engage in your analysis are:

<b>How?</b>	<p>... <b>did the issue/problem become an issue/problem?</b></p> <p>... <b>is there agreement about this? Who agrees?</b></p> <p>... <b>is there disagreement about this? Who disagrees and why?</b></p>
<b>What if?</b>	<p>...<b>these explanations are wrong?</b></p> <p>...<b>another theory was applied?</b></p> <p>...<b>a different explanation was used?</b></p> <p>Here you are moving into a more evaluative approach by considering the implications of different explanations or results.</p>
<b>So what?</b>	<p>...<b>is the significance of what I have been arguing so far?</b></p> <p>Here you are beginning to address the values, meaning and significance of the points you have made. It allows you justify the approach you have taken and distinguish between major and minor factors under discussion.</p>
<b>What next?</b>	<p>This question may not apply to all assignments as it is concerned with making recommendations and predictions about future actions.</p>

### Writing the assignment conclusion

It is conceivable that the last two points (**so what** and **what next**) might well form the basis of your **conclusion** to your assignment. Your conclusion should give a sense of completion and should summarise the key points or central ideas you have made in the assignment. On some courses, you may also be asked to include recommendations as well as a conclusion.

## Remember

A critical essay should attempt to argue or present a case for or against something based on the evidence available. In that respect, it aims (most of the time) to be objective. This is why you are asked to write most assignments in the third person (This assignment will...) and **not** in the first (I will...).

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## Reference

Learning Development (2010) *Critical thinking: Improving analysis, argument and structure in your assignments*. Available at:

<http://www.learningdevelopment.plymouth.ac.uk/LDstudyguides/pdf/8Criticalthinking.pdf> (Accessed: 6th July 2011).

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## Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as 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)**

