

## Critical Analysis When Writing

This workshop will...

- Provide a basic definition of critical analysis
- Examine the writing process and ways to construct critically analytic text
- Provide a checklist of actions when writing critically analytic text

Teaching points:

1. What is critical analysis?
2. The writing process
3. Constructing critically analytic text: taking a position
4. Constructing critically analytic text: forming a line of reason
5. Constructing critically analytic text: sentence and word level
6. Checklist

## 1. What is critical analysis?

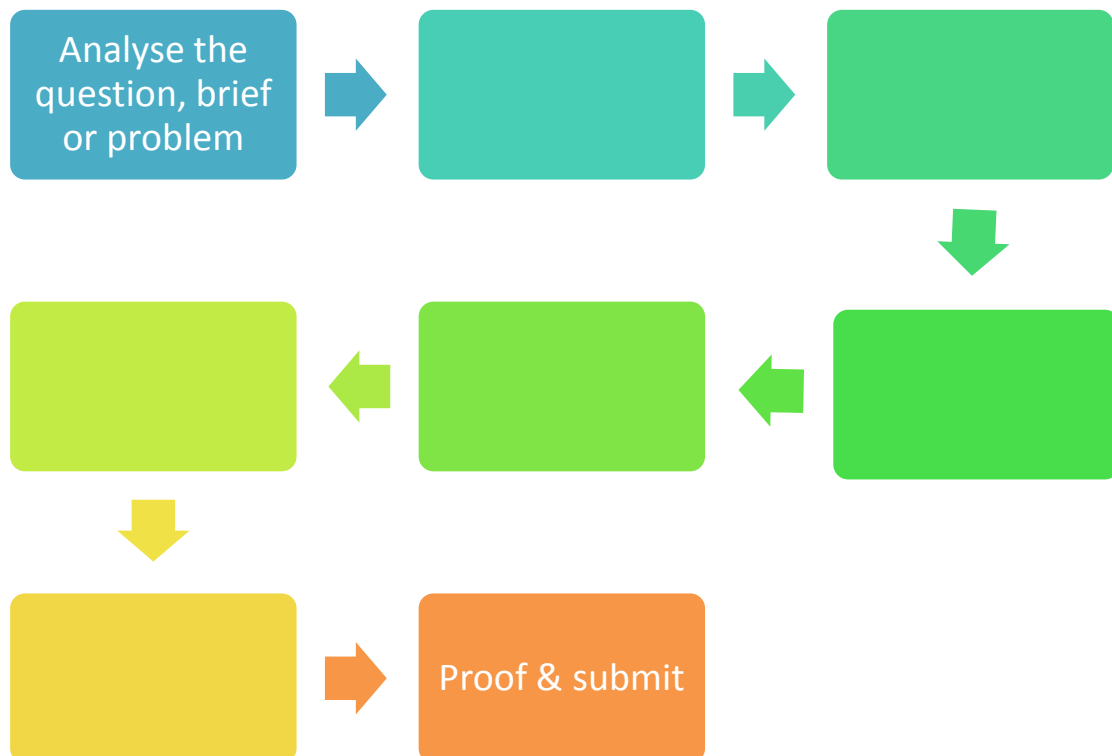
In essence, it is...

- ✓ Something that happens **before** writing take place
- ✓ Engaging **analytical thinking**
  - by looking at something (whether tangible or conceptual) before you start your reading for your **initial impressions**
  - **Breaking it down** into its constituent parts using analytical thinking of close observation
- ✓ Employing **critical thinking** by...
  - **Asking questions** of the origins of ideas, the assumptions behind the ideas, and the applicability of the ideas
  - How it **compares** to other 'somethings' so as to make a judgement about its value or significance.
  - **Evidencing** your conclusions and findings from this questioning process.
  - Keeping an **open mind** about the application of this knowledge to address a problem or answer a question.

## 2. The writing process – the importance of pre-writing

### TALKING POINT

Together we will identify the steps or stages in the writing process assessed work. You have been given the first and last.



### 3. Constructing critically analytic text: taking a position

When you write a piece of critically analytic text you will be writing in response to someone else's perspective and argument. So, you will have to make a decision about what angle or point of view you want to take. You can do any of the following...

- **Agree** with a particular point of view & presenting reliable evidence to support the position taken.
- **Reject** a particular point of view, but again using reliable evidence to do this.
- **Concede** that an existing point of view has merits, but needs to be qualified in certain respects, and stating what these are.
- **Propose** a new point of view, or reformulating an existing one that the new version makes a better explanation for the situation under discussion.
- **Reconcile** two positions which may seem at variance by bringing a new perspective to bear on the topic.
- **Connect or synthesize** different ideas, so new approaches and points of view can be brought to bear on the subject.

### 4. Constructing critically analytic text: forming a line of reasoning

You need to develop something to say – even in a non-argument paper there should be a 'line of reasoning' that your thinking is coherently following. This is messy in the pre-writing stage and the stages 3, 4 and 5 of the pre-writing stages are meant to shape this messiness into a linear, logical order.

Your line of reasoning will be made up of individual points/themes with each one written by you to both stand alone as an individual 'brick' in the argument you are constructing, and to flow from one and to the next.



Each 'brick' is as important as the last, so you are building an igloo!



(philipmartin.info)

Here's an example of grouping similarly theme 'bricks' together which can then be made to flow in a coherent line of reasoning.

An overview of a **pro**-euthanasia argument.

Reasons/themes based on rights

- **People have an explicit right to die**
- A separate right to die is not necessary, because **our other human rights imply the right to die**
- Death is a private matter and **if there is no harm to others, the state and other people have no right to interfere**

Practical reasons/themes

- **It is possible to regulate euthanasia**
- Death is a private matter and **if there is no harm to others, the state and other people have no right to interfere**
- **Allowing people to die may free up scarce health resources**
- **Euthanasia happens anyway**

Philosophical reasons/themes

- **Euthanasia satisfies the criterion that moral rules must be universalisable**
- **Euthanasia happens anyway**
- **Is death a bad thing?**

(BBC, 2014)

**TALKING POINT**

What are your reasons to support an **anti**-euthanasia argument?

**Activity 1:** Arranging reasons into a line of reasoning

Now you have a list of reasons, group them under whatever heading you wish and develop a line of reasoning using the space below.

So, how can this logical flow be achieved from all the separate bits of data, concepts, theories and ideas that have been located, absorbed and noted? Each 'brick' becomes a paragraph revolving around one theme which is composed of specific elements which both:

- link to the themed paragraphs before and after in a logical way
- are relevant to the question/task you are undertaking

Use this 5 point paragraph to construct a critically analytic piece of work:

- A. Introduction
- B. Explanation and detail necessary relating to the theme
- C. **The theme** in your line of reasoning
- D. The evidence which supports your theme and any further critical analysis of that evidence
- E. The conclusion that states the importance/relevance of the point to the question/brief/problem and/or links forward to the next theme



Let's look at one example – one possible theme 'for' the death penalty:

More cost effective than keeping people in jail all their lives.

**A** Another point in favour of the death penalty deals with economics.

**B** Spiralling utility service costs;

price of food increase;

minimum wage level risen = combination unsustainable

**C** More cost effective than keeping people in jail all their lives.

**D** Government statistics regarding all of above;

utility companies own reports:

prison service information on costs

**E** Financial implications of keeping people alive is crippling to the State.



As you can see, when you start to develop a paragraph, it is not necessary to write in full sentences. You can convert bullet points when you have allocated all the necessary information to the appropriate element.

**Activity 2:** Constructing a critically analytic paragraph

Choose either another theme 'for' the death penalty or one that is 'against' it. Now, in pairs or small groups, construct a paragraph using the '5-point' structure above.

**A Introduction**

**B Explanation/detail**

**C Main theme**

**D Evidence (where you might get it from)**

**E Conclusion**



## 5. Constructing critically analytic text: sentence and word level

- **SUV** - sweeping generalisations, **u**nspecific and vague statements

*All findings in recent studies...*

*The population of Britain faces difficult times...*

*There are a lot of possibilities in change management*

*Only some of the clinical practice needs to adapt...*

*A small amount of acid was poured on....*

- Using too much word count to explain and detail instead of presenting a point and analysing its evidence. (use the 5 point model on previous page)
- Let the sources do the 'talking' and not have too many reporting verbs

*Smith states...*

*According to Prasad...*

*Heath et al. propose...*

*Lin and Crockett suggest*

- Use words that help the reader/marker to follow your line of reasoning (introducing or adding reasons), alternative points of view, and conclusions.

In the table below are some examples of words or phrases to use to build your critically analytic writing. What other words could you add?

Line of reasoning	Alternative points of view	Conclusions
First	Alternatively	Therefore
First of all	Others argue that	In conclusion
To begin	However	
In addition	Nonetheless	
Besides	Although	
Furthermore	By contrast	

Adapted from Cottrell (2005: 173-178)

## 6. Checklist

This involves the following

- Being clear what your conclusions are
- Showing a clear line of reasoning – an 'argument' leading to your conclusion
- Presenting evidence to support your reasoning
- Reading your own writing critically as well as your sources
- Viewing your subject from multiple perspectives
- Writing in an critical, analytic style, rather than in a descriptive, personal or journalistic style

Adapted from Cottrell ( 2003:222)

If a piece of academic text does not employ critical analysis, it tends to be descriptive. (There other types of writing that is neither: narrative stories and poetry are two examples) You may be given assignments in which you are asked to produce purely descriptive writing, and some subjects ask for this type of writing to be so detailed that the lines become blurred about where descriptive writing ends and where critical analytic writing starts.

For further support on Critical Analysis, we run workshops on What is Critical Analysis?, Critical Analytic Thinking and Critical Analysis whilst Reading. We also run specific workshops on How to Read Journal Articles Critically. Please also refer to the books in the list below.

### ***References***

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**Answers**

TALKING POINT

Steps or stages in the writing process

