

WRITING CRITICALLY

What is critical writing?

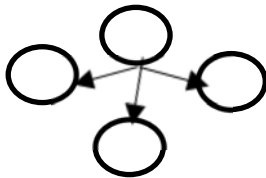
Critical writing is about developing your own academic voice within your subject area.

Developing your critical writing skills involves reflecting, researching, note-making and reading, as well as writing.

As a critical writer you take a clear position and support your argument/s by providing evidence and examples from your research, citing scholarly sources.

Before you write

As soon as you decide which assignment question you will answer, or the topic for your research, start thinking critically about the topic. You could use a mind/concept map to record your ideas.



Read a range of scholarly articles on your research/assignment topic. This will provide you with a variety of perspectives and approaches to consider.

As you read, ask critical questions and identify areas of agreement or disagreement between scholars.

Think about the position you will take or the argument you will present in your writing.

TIP

Read widely on your topic. The more knowledgeable you are about a particular subject, the more confident you will be to write with a critical perspective.

As you write

The most effective academic writing is clear, concise and direct. Aim to communicate your ideas clearly and concisely.

You will need to incorporate your own **academic voice** in your writing. There are a number of ways you can do this.

For example:

In your introduction

- state your position or argument as a thesis statement or hypothesis,
- outline the issue, problem or research area you are addressing,
- provide an overview of existing theories and/or research on the issue/topic,
- define important terms and explain key concepts you will cover.

In the body of your essay/report

- develop and support your position, referring to existing theories/research,
- provide examples from scholarly sources, such as peer-reviewed articles,
- compare and contrast approaches,
- interpret data, evidence or findings,
- explain concepts or theories,
- evaluate theories, arguments and evidence,
- identify any gaps or limitations in the existing research, and
- make recommendations based on your research.

In your conclusion

- summarise your main findings,
- outline the significance or relevance of your research, approach or findings.

Being critical

As an academic writer you are expected to engage critically with other scholars in your subject area. This involves agreeing and disagreeing with scholars' arguments and evaluating their ideas and theories.

Being critical can also mean critiquing scholars' ideas, for example identifying limitations, biases or weaknesses in an argument or research.

It is important to include all relevant evidence, ideas and theories, not just those that support your position.

Engaging critically - some examples:

'As Barber argues/states/concludes...'

'Barber's study suggests that...'

'The most important finding of this study is..'

'Although these findings suggest x, another possible interpretation is...'

'A significant weakness of this study is...'

'One limitation of this approach is that...'

'Barber (2016) fails to take account of...'

'The evidence presented does not support the conclusion that...'

TIP: Use the **Academic Phrasebank** developed by The University of Manchester to help you incorporate your academic voice in your writing:
<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk>

Revising your writing

Before submitting your assignments, make sure you review your writing - leave enough time to edit and proof-read. You can use the checklists below to help you.

Editing checklist: ✓

- Is my argument/position clear?
- Does my argument flow logically?
- Have I:
 - used my own academic voice?
 - included all my references?
 - used the correct referencing style?
 - paraphrased sufficiently, keeping the meaning of the original text?
 - defined technical terms (where appropriate)?

Proof-reading checklist: ✓

- Have I used correct grammar?
- Are all words written in full, avoiding contractions like 'don't', 'isn't' or 'it's'?
- Have I used punctuation correctly?
- Are all words spelt correctly?

TIP: Use the proof-reading tools available in your computer's writing software to help you check your grammar and spelling. These can usually be found in the Review tab in Word.

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