



Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the analysis and evaluation of information

- don't just accept what you read or hear
- ask questions of the information you are receiving
- whether you are reading a book, journal article or sitting in a lecture.

Critical thinking

Critical thinking underpins all academic activity.

Critical thinking allows you to develop your own academic argument.

Critical?

Argument?

Aren't these negative terms?

Not in the academic context

Critical = questioning and investigative

Argument = your viewpoint on an issue – backed up with evidence

Critical thinking in everyday life

You make critical judgements all of the time

E.g. You need to book a venue for a big party. You are looking at the website of a potential venue.

Passive thinking – take the marketing promises at face value and book it!

Critical thinking - identify the factors that are important to you and analyse them for suitability – location, size of room, price, food choices, accommodation available, etc. Then compare with another venue.

So you look at the evidence, weigh up the pros and cons and once you have been convinced, you make a decision.

So how does work in academic study?

Weigh up different perspectives and theories on a topic to come up with your own viewpoint.

Keep an open mind – be prepared to be convinced or unconvinced by an author.

Question: Who? What? Why? How? So What?

Explore: examine different perspectives by comparing work published by different authors on the same topic

Evaluate: look for strengths and weaknesses. Consider credibility, reliability and validity.

Agree or disagree? Develop your own opinion (academic argument) and justify it with evidence from your sources to answer your assignments.

In more detail:

Who? Who is the author?

Evaluate what credibility do they have?

For example, you are researching heart disease, who has more credibility a cardiac surgeon or a journalist specialising in health issues?

Where? Where has the material been published?

Evaluate: Is this a quality publication? For example, a peer-reviewed journal article or quality website?

What? What are the main points? i.e. what is the writer's argument?

Evaluate: Are the main points adequately supported by examples or evidence?

Why should you accept the evidence presented as the truth?

Why? Why has the research been under-taken?

Evaluate: Do the authors justify the need for the research?

Is there evidence of bias or a specific agenda?

Is the author sponsored by an interested party or do they use emotive language that would indicate a lack of objectivity?

How? How was the research carried out and analysed?

Evaluate: Is the research methodology sound or are there unacknowledged weaknesses?

- is the sample size adequate, is the sample randomised, is the data current?

So What? What are the conclusion drawn from the research?

Evaluate: Do you agree that the conclusions stated are appropriate based on the evidence provided?

- could there be alternative or additional conclusions?

What are the implications of the work?

Is there scope or requirements for further research in this area?

Does it confirm or contradict accepted theories?

Synthesise: Consider alternative perspectives -look at sources written by other authors

What is your viewpoint based on the evidence you have read?

Make connections between the different sources you have read and bring them together to develop your own argument

Apply critical thinking to your own work

After you have written your assignment, critically review it:

Have I included all relevant points to answer the question set?

Have I included examples and evidence for the arguments that I'm making?

Am I presenting a logical, well-balanced argument based on the evidence described?

Have I been able to identify gaps or weaknesses in the research?

Have I concluded my arguments with a sensible and well-supported conclusion?

Have I included suggestions for further research?

Remember that the person marking your work will be asking these questions!

The process of critical thinking should apply to the way you read, write, talk and think about academic study.

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