

Critical Thinking

Being able to think critically is a skill developed during undergraduate study and is expected of all post-graduate students. Critical thinking is applied to both the study material and to your own writing.

You need to be able to both read and write critically. This means that you are considering:

- Whether the message you are reading is valid
- Whether the evidence supports the conclusions
- Whether the message is supported or contradicted by other writers.

Critical analysis

Writing a critical analysis requires you to evaluate, analyse and interpret research literature using facts to support your argument or position.

To critically analyse a text you can use the following as a guide:

- What is the background?
 - Who is the author
 - What type of text is it?
 - Who is the intended reader?
 - When was it written?
- What is the purpose?
 - What is the author trying to convince you of?
 - How is the text structured (headings, tables etc)?
- What evidence is offered to support the argument?
 - Is the evidence accurate and relevant?
- Is the argument logical?
 - Are key terms and concepts defined?
 - Do the points flow logically from one to the next?
 - Does the conclusion accurately flow from the evidence?

Applying critical analysis to research studies.

- General overview
 - Is the article describing a research project?
 - Is the research method clearly described?
 - Is the research qualitative or quantitative?
 - What were the aims of the research project?

- Does the title clearly reflect the focus of the text?
- Research design
 - How is the published literature used to support the study?
 - What is the theoretical framework and is it appropriate for the research topic?
 - What is the general method?
 - How was the data collected?
 - Are the method and data collection strategies appropriate for the research topic?
- Participants
 - What selection method was used?
 - How was confidentiality and/or anonymity assured?
 - What ethical issues were identified and how were they addressed?
- Research question and data analysis
 - How does the research question relate to the literature in the literature review?
 - Can the data analysis strategies be easily identified and followed?
- The findings
 - Is it clear how the findings have been generated from the data?
 - Is it clear how the findings relate to theoretical perspectives?
 - Are the links between the findings in this research and other research clearly made?
- The role of the researcher
 - Are the researchers' biases, assumptions and expectations made clear?
 - Are the limitations of the study made clear? Can you think of other limitations which should have been acknowledged?
 - What recommendations for further study are made?
- Making the links between different texts
 - How does this study's findings relate to other texts in your reference list?
 - Which other studies confirm these findings?
 - Which other studies contradict these findings?