

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

How do I critically analyse? In order to critically analyse you need to have a **deep** understanding of the topic.

Critical Analysis involves:

- Asking questions about the material being analysed to clarify the facts.
- Making judgements and evaluating the material.

Clarify

What is under investigation? Is it an idea? An approach? A theory? A technique? An argument? A model? What are the parts and what relationship do they have to each other?

Make judgements/evaluate

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the material. Use criteria to measure or judge the idea/approach/theory.

In general, students lose marks for lack of critical analysis more than for other weaknesses in their writing. Some common comments from tutors are;

- Lack of analysis.
- Too much description not enough critique.
- No criteria used to structure the analysis.

Critical analytical writing is a balanced argument and:

- Identifies the significance.
- Evaluates strengths and weaknesses.
- Weighs one piece of information against another.
- Makes reasoned judgements.
- Argues a case according to evidence.
- Shows why something is relevant or suitable.
- Indicates why something will work.
- Identifies whether something is appropriate or suitable.

Find a balance between descriptive writing and critical analysis

Both descriptive and analytical writing have their place. Descriptive writing is needed to give background information (e.g. why you chose that particular topic). However if the task is to critically analyse then descriptive writing needs to be kept to a minimum so that more attention is paid to critical analysis.

How is a critical analysis structured?

Essays

- Introduction* Outline your view point/position/answer.
- Body* Paragraphs in a logical order, structured to convey critical analysis and judgement.
- Conclusion* Restate your viewpoint (i.e. the results of your analysis) and give an overview of your main Reasons for that viewpoint.

Reports

- Introduction* State the purpose of the report and provide the theoretical basis for your analysis
- Body* Ensure the paragraphs convey analysis and judgement.
- Conclusion* State your findings and your reasons. Include any recommendations (if relevant).

Sources:

- Cottrell, S. (2003). *The study skills handbook*. (2nd ed.) New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
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2

