

# How to write a critique essay

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This guide looks at writing a critique essay (also known as a critical essay). A critique essay looks critically at a particular subject, area or topic. It means evaluating information, comparing and contrasting theories and analysing situations. A critical essay does not mean being overly critical, it rather involves being able to challenge points of view and asking questions. Most further education courses involve writing essays of this type.

## **How to Prepare for Writing a Critical Essay**

Understanding the title is particularly important in a critical essay. You need to deconstruct what you are being asked.

First look for the underlying task you are asked to do (are you to produce an argument, argue for a position, or analyse a concept?).

Next, identify the content words in the question: what subject are you to write about

Also identify any limiting words in the question: what limits the scope of the essay

Plan by creating a concept or mind map of your current knowledge and what you need to expand (see figure 1 for example mind map)

A useful time-planner for writing a critical essay can be found here:

[http://www.jcu.edu.](http://www.jcu.edu.au/tldinfo/writingskills/documents/Critical_Essay_Planner.pdf)

[au/tldinfo/writingskills/documents/Critical\\_Essay\\_Planner.pdf](http://www.jcu.edu.au/tldinfo/writingskills/documents/Critical_Essay_Planner.pdf)

## **How to Structure a Critical Essay**

Critique essays share the same structure as other types of essay, that is they should have an introduction, main body and conclusion. However, there are

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some features that distinguish the critique essay from other types:

The introduction needs to include a thesis statement which identifies your position. You should also indicate briefly how you will argue for that position.

The main body will present your argument logically and in a coherent way.

You could use an appropriate paragraph structure for example starting each paragraph with a topic sentence (explaining the subject and main idea), follows this with one or more supporting sentence(s) (justifying the point you are making with evidence, critiquing opposing viewpoints) and end the paragraph with a conclusion which relates it back to the main question and thesis.

The conclusion will summarise the main points of the essay, and relate the evidence discussed back to the original thesis. It may also consider the implications of the conclusions drawn, examine limitations, explore other relevant aspects and make suggestions.

## **Critical Essay Skills**

You will need to display skills in analysis and the ability to critique in essays of this sort.

Analysis involves a systematic and thorough approach to your topic, breaking ideas down into constituent parts, looking at how ideas work in isolation and in the context of a wider theoretical framework, and asking questions.

Critical skills involve interpretation, evaluation, judgement and justifying; the ability to compare with other ideas; understanding how phenomena can be interpreted in different ways; and assessing arguments in terms of evidence for and against.

The ability to construct an argument is key to successful critical writing. You should develop a line of reasoning which backs up your position. You also need to be able to identify and critique opposing positions. You should present your reasoning in a way which is clear and well structured, and flows logically.

There are a number of general critical questions which apply to any text.

Keep the following in mind to hone your approach to essay writing:

How is this known What makes the writer think it is true

How reliable is this

What is really going on here

Why How When

What has been left unsaid

Which argument is stronger and why

What is the main argument here Do I agree with it (Why, Why Not?)

Is this relevant

How will I use this information

How does this information relate to what I already know

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