

**Critical thinking is a key skill for success at university. Every piece of information you come across can be questioned: what you read or hear is almost certainly not the whole picture, and should be evaluated carefully.**

When reading anything at university, it is not enough to ask yourself “what is this person saying?”, or “how can I understand and memorise this?” You need to move beyond that and start to consider that particular text in broader contexts - your module, your course, the literature in your field, and the world at large.

Being critical means questioning the evidence that you are reading and including in your assignments. This does not mean just being negative, but also recognising good ideas and reliable findings. Below are some questions you can ask...

**To evaluate the quality of text and ideas, relative to others in your area:**

**What are the strengths and weaknesses of this?**

- Am I prepared to accept this position? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Does the author have any biases or make any assumptions?
- What evidence is the author using and how reliable is it?
- Does the author make any generalisations?
- Do other claims support this idea?
- What is the basis for the author’s argument? Is it logical and why?

**To evaluate a research study:**

- What is the research question? Have they successfully answered it?
- What are the main findings?
- Have the findings been honestly / reliably reported?
- What methodology was used and why?
- Was that a suitable methodology for this question?
- How many participants were there? Was their sample large enough to base their conclusions on?
- What sampling method was used?
- Are the discussion and conclusion soundly based on the findings – or do they go too far?
- How do these findings relate to other research studies in the field?



**To make connections with the contemporary political, social and economic climate:**

- Who wrote this text, when and why?
- What is the strategic purpose of this idea?
- Or, why this, now?
- What does the author want me to believe and why?
- What has led to this idea?
- What would this idea lead to if implemented?

**To make connections with the real world:**

- What are my experiences with this idea?
- How can this idea be applied to practical situations?
- What practical problems does this idea create or solve?
- What are the practical strengths and weaknesses?

**To bring texts together and develop an argument:**

- How do ideas differ between authors? Are there any key similarities or differences?
- How do different ideas or evidence link together to form broader concepts?
- How can certain observations be explained through theories?
- Are there connections between factors – e.g. cause and effect? Or correlations between different factors?
- What are the overall problems – and what solutions can you identify for these problems?
- What is the significance of certain events and theories?
- What are the implications of these texts collectively?
- What conclusions can you draw from these texts?

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