

Critical Writing Workshop

Language for Reading and Writing Critically

To be critical in the context of reading and writing involves being able to:

- **make judgements** about what you read. These judgements may be positive or negative.

E.g. *Several authors have categorised the effects of X in very useful ways.*

Many papers ignore factors such as X when considering the applications of Y.

- **define a phenomenon** clearly by drawing on the key aspects of definitions provided by other authors. Examples:

E.g. *X is a difficult concept to define, because . . .*

The key concepts/aspects that are covered in existing definitions are A, B and C.

- **establish the relative significance** or importance of different aspects of what you read. Examples:

E.g. *The most urgent of these questions/challenges is X, because . . .*

The most important category identified appears to be X, since . . .

The most frequently mentioned advantages are A, B, and C.

- **distinguish between contexts**, and make judgments about **the validity or relevance** of certain ideas/information/solutions within those contexts. Example:

E.g. *This solution has been shown to be extremely effective in small to medium enterprises, but it is debatable whether it would be appropriate in large enterprises*

- **show the relationship** (similarities, differences) between different ideas, information, theories. Example:

E.g. *While X theory focuses on the role of relationships in building trust, Y theory deals primarily with the way in which the technology itself may enhance or diminish trust.*

- **show the implications** of different ideas/theories/solutions. Example:

E.g. *From the perspective of X (theory), then, solutions would have to address ways of building relationships in an online environment, while from the perspective of Y (theory) solutions would involve developing effective user interfaces.*

- **show an awareness of possible counter-claims** on any issue. Example:

E.g. *The predominant view on X is that it can best be solved by means of Y. However, it could be argued that Y would only work in the case of there being certain constraints on competition between different organizations.*

- **identify any gaps** in the literature. Example:

E.g. *One factor upon which appears to be overlooked is the influence of organisational structure on X practices.*

- **identify trends and patterns** in existing work. Examples:

E.g. *Problems relating to X are increasingly being related to the use of . . .*
While the value of X is being emphasised in the context of Y, there is also a trend towards considering X in the context of Z rather than Y.

- **sum up key issues, implications, or problems** that emerge from each section that you cover. Examples:

E.g. *It would seem, then, that X leads to Y, while A usually leads to F and G. This means that, in taking a two-pronged approach, the disadvantages of introducing X can, to some extent, be mitigated by using A at the same time.*

To sum up, then, the crucial points to be taken into account are X and Y.