VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
Kampala · Uganda
"Come Prepared to Learn, Leave Prepared to Succeed"

Scientific Writing & Study Skills (FBS 121)

Mathew Rogers Muyinda, MPH

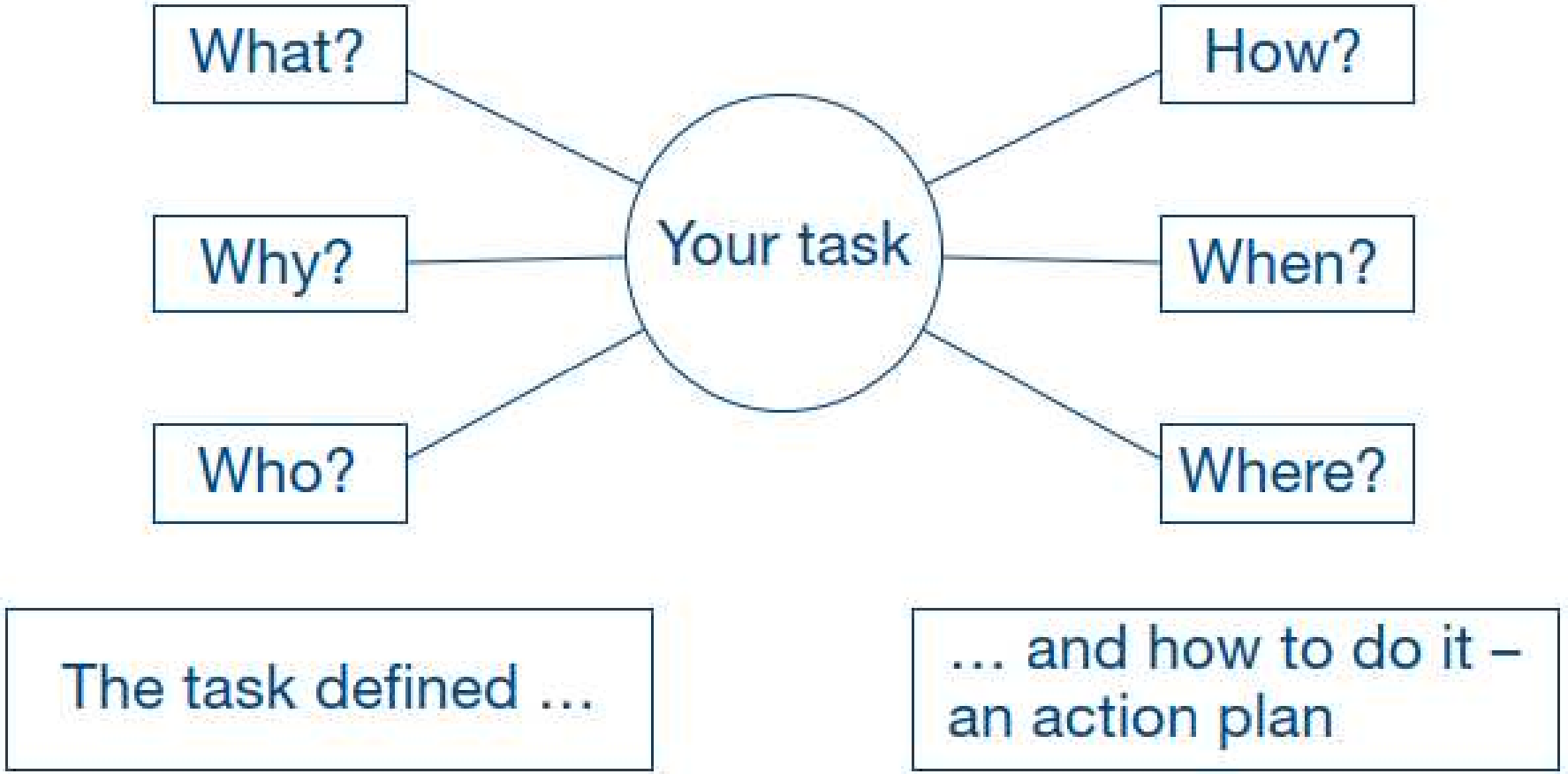
Faculty of Health Sciences, Victoria University

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Getting a critical mindset

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Getting critical



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Defining your task

What exactly do you have to produce?	… in your assignment?
What format? *Report? Essay? Template? Flowchart? Portfolio? Presentation? Tests? Modelling?*	
Any guidance about structure, layout and style?	
How long? How many questions?	
What % of marks does the task count for?	
What topic(s)?	

Why are you being asked to do this?	
External reasons: the learning outcomes you are expected to achieve.	
Internal reasons: your private purpose – interest in the subject, personal satisfaction.	

Who are you writing for? It helps if you can visualise your reader.	
Your tutor is always your audience. What do you know about what they want to see?	
Do you have another real audience? For example, giving a presentation to your seminar group?	
Or an imagined audience, like writing a report (for a company for example), or an article for a particular journal?	

Write as if…

- You are addressing someone:
  - with the same experience
  - with knowledge of the general subject area as yourself
  - who has not yet covered that particular topic/module/course
- Do not be tempted to:
  - talk up, using fancy language designed to impress
  - talk down, with an inappropriate informal or chatty style

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Writing action plan

How … ? What guidance are you given about what to include?	… in your assignment?
For example: Use of appendices? Style of referencing? Detailed methodology? Acceptable and unacceptable practice?	

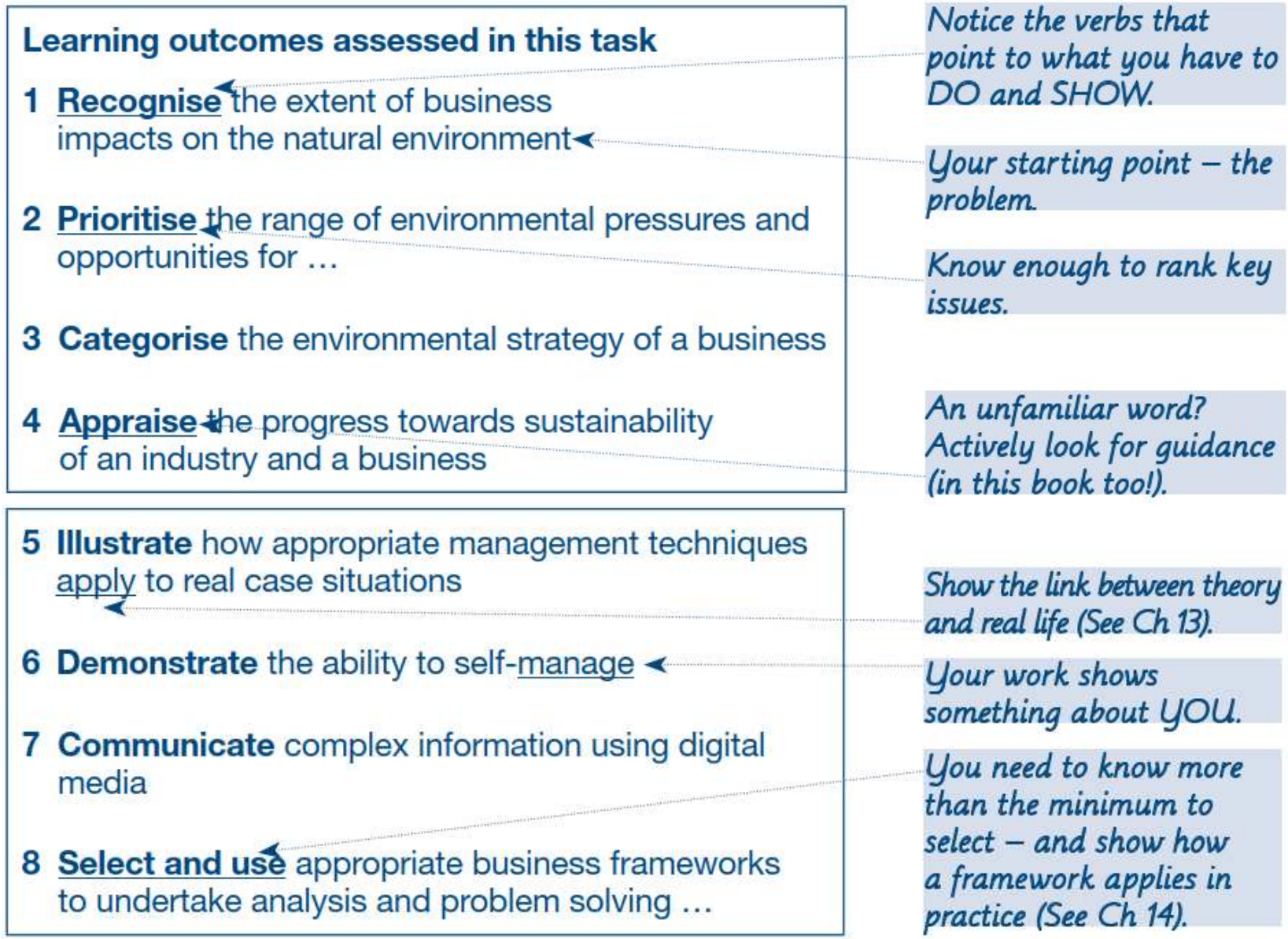
When … ? Is the deadline for final hand-in?	
Are there earlier deadlines for drafts, feedback and various elements?	
Do you have, or need to apply for, an extended deadline?	
How will you balance working towards one deadline with working towards others? And life, job etc.?	

Where … ? Will you find the information?	
How much of it is easy to find (weekly online reading lists)?	
How much do you have to research yourself? Or go beyond the core reading list?	

What are tutors looking for?

- There's no guesswork here: look at the learning outcomes
- Learning outcomes spell out what is expected from you
- Once you are clear about what you are expected to learn from the module, you are well on the way to understand how you will be assessed.

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Criteria/qualities	A	B+	B	C	F
Knowledge and understanding Level of subject knowledge Able to identify key debates Understands relevant concepts and theory					
Reading and research Selection of appropriate material Effective use of a wide range of material Evidence of independent research					
Evidence and analysis Logical development of argument Evaluation of source material Evidence provided to support case					
Presentation Clarity of expression Clear and accurate referencing					

What are the key debates?

What concepts and theories should you know about? Which are relevant to this question?

How will you tackle the reading? And choose what you use and what you don't?

What does 'wide range' mean? How many sources? What sort?

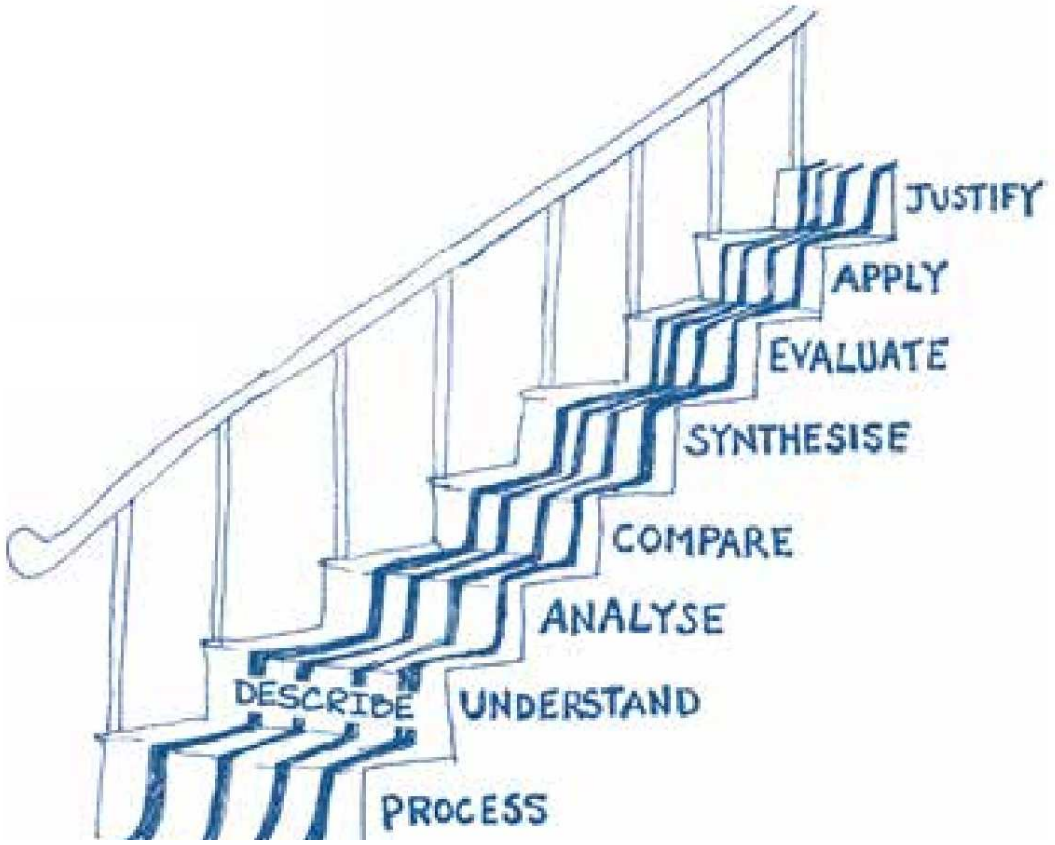
... going beyond the reading list.

How do the various things you have read support the points you want to make? Or not?

In one sentence, what are you going to say? What points do you want to make?

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Stairway to critical thinking



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Critical thinking stairway (cont)

- Start at the bottom
  - First 4 steps for getting to grips with your reading and research:
    - Describe
    - Analyse
    - Compare

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Critical thinking stairway (cont)

- Top 4 steps show critical thinking skills you need to show in your writing:
  - Evaluate
  - Apply
  - Justify

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Use critical thinking to develop arguments, draw conclusions, make inferences and identify implications.			
Transfer the understanding you have gained from your critical evaluation and use in response to questions, assignments and projects.			
Assess the worth of an idea in terms of its relevance to your needs, the evidence on which it is based and how it relates to other pertinent ideas.			
Bring together different sources of information to serve an argument or idea you are constructing. Make logical connections between the different sources that help you shape and support your ideas.			
Put similarities and differences in two columns. See p 122			**Compare**
Are the sources saying the same things? Or different? See p 121		**Analyse**	Examine how these
DESCRIBE	**Understand**	Comprehend the key points, assumptions,	
Process	Take in the information, ie what you have read, heard, seen or done.		

START HERE

Can you see the question you are working on from start to finish? See p 127		**Justify**
Can you use this evidence or approach in your assignment or practice? See p 126	**Apply**	
	Evaluate	Have you shown how your sources are useful (or not) in the question you are addressing? See p 125
Synthesise	Do the sources you have read take you in one direction rather than another? See p 124	

Explore the similarities, differences between the ideas you are reading about.

key components fit together and relate to each other.

arguments and evidence presented. What is the evidence for the points made? See p 119

Jot down the key message from two sources you have read. See p 119

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From strategic to critical

- What … exactly is being said?
- Who … has written or said this?
- Why … have the author/s written this?
- How … did they come to their conclusions?
- When … was this said/written/published?
- Where … does the material or the views come from?
- So what … does this add up to? What are the implications? Why does it matter? And
- What next? How do I use it?

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Getting critical in research and reading

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Ask questions about the sources

What kind of text is this?

How is it useful to me?

Health and social care module

On the reading list
Bradshaw J (ed) (2016). *The wellbeing of children in the UK* (4th edn). Bristol: Policy Press.
Tisdall E and Kay M (2015). Children's wellbeing and children's rights in tension? *International Journal of Children's Rights*. 23 (4) pp769-789. Doi: 10.1163/15718182-02304003
The Good Childhood Report 2020. The Children's Society. (Webpage accessed 20 June 2021)
Amerrjckx G and Humblet PC (2014). Child well-being: what does it mean? *Children and Society*. 28 (5) pp 404-415. Doi:10.1111/chso.12003

'Edited' shows that chapters are written by specialists in different topic areas.

Book. Broad title, introductory text. 4th edition – suggests it's a popular core text updated over time.

Quite recent. Available online. Check there isn't a more recent edition.

Journal article. The title points to tension and debate about rights and wellbeing. The authors will have a discussion and an argument.

Journal article. More debate – looks like the term 'wellbeing' itself is understood differently ... Has it changed over time?

Report. A well-established organisation. Reports and data will be up-to-date, reflecting the issues of the time.

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A critical search online

You – the researcher
You're interested in carbon offsetting. You follow the library guide on searching databases and…

Your friendly library ☺
SEARCH FOR
carbon offsetting

Search Results
1147 records for 1995–2022

???!!! Help! Where do I start? There's so much stuff…

Start thinking. What exactly do you want to explore in your dissertation? What question are you asking? This is far too general; it isn't asking a question and you can't research it. So focus down; narrow your field of interest. Ask a question.

I'm interested in deforestation too. I've seen wildlife programmes showing the impact. I'm interested in sub-Saharan Africa: so many problems that make survival so difficult for so many and here in the West even I can't resist a cheap flight…

So how about this for a question?
What is the effect of carbon offsetting on deforestation in sub-Saharan Africa?

Your friendly library ☺
SEARCH FOR
deforestation
AND carbon offsetting
AND sub-Saharan Africa

Search Results
0 records found

??!! Help! There's nothing on my topic!

No. There probably isn't. This is very specific. But before you give up, try other keywords. But if there really isn't anything? This could be great if you are engaged in original fieldwork research, but if you're not...? You need to try a two-pronged approach. Think laterally! Critically!

First try locating research on an aspect of the issue I know is well established.

Your friendly library ☺

SEARCH FOR

deforestation

AND | sub-Saharan Africa

Search Results

17 records found ...

This is beginning to look researchable (migrant land rights / carbon storage in forestry / gorillas and armed conflict / cooking stoves …) – but how to find out if there is a link with carbon offsetting?

There must be something on carbon offsetting AND deforestation in other parts of the world – or what's the debate about?

Your friendly library ☺

SEARCH FOR

deforestation

AND | carbon offsetting

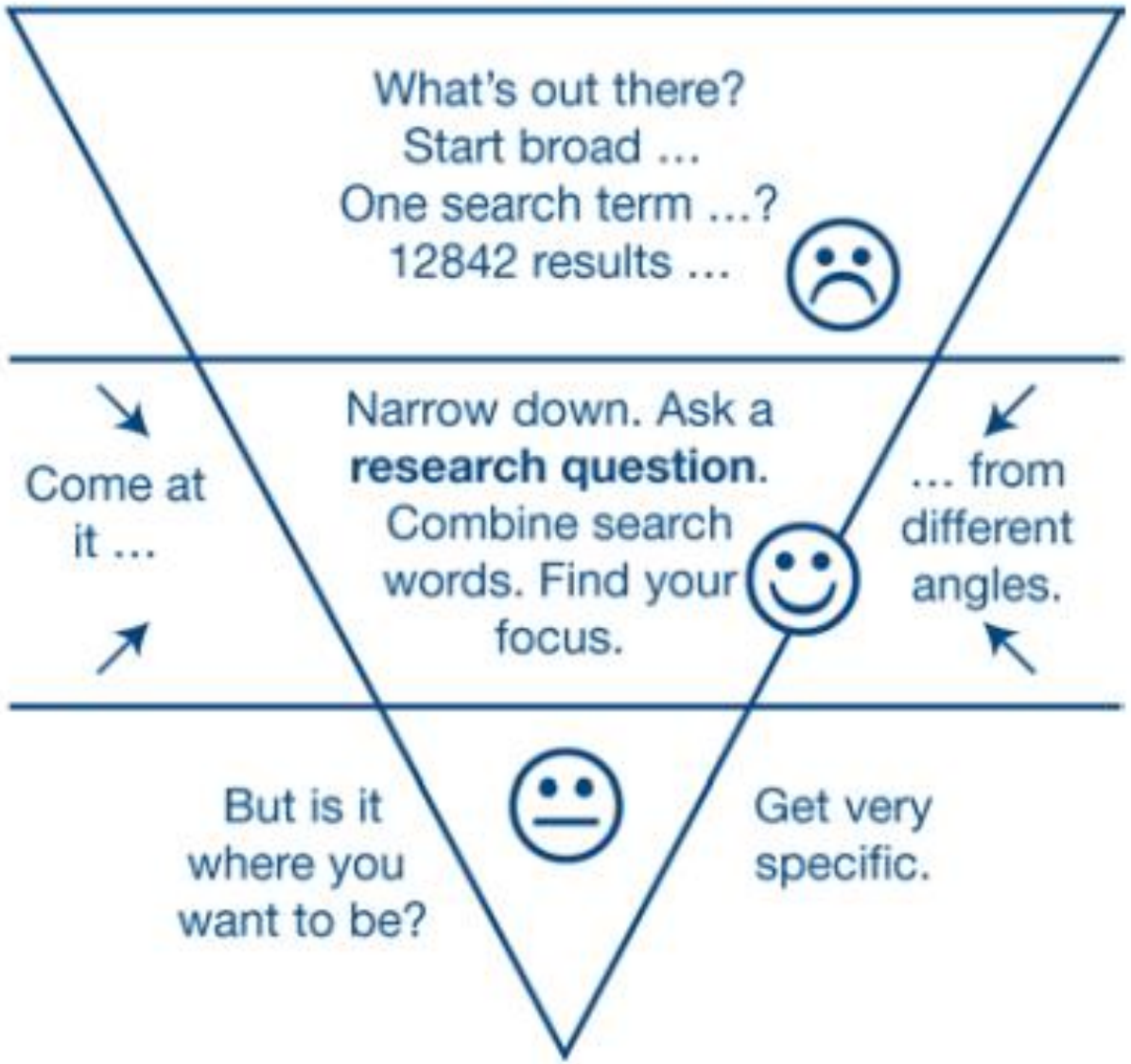
Search Results

51 records found...

... many relating to South America, South East Asia... but might something here apply to sub-Saharan Africa? And if not why not? This is getting interesting...

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The research comfort zone



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Evaluating your sources

What … kind of source is it? What are the key findings? Are they relevant to what you want to know?

How … did they do it? By what methodology, or approach? Why did they do it this way?



Why … was the research carried out? What is the research question? The aim?

When … was it published? And research carried out?

Who … are the researchers? Individual(s)? Organisations? What are their credentials?

Where … is it published? How did you find it?

And overarching all these specific questions are the big ones:

So what… are the implications?

Why does it matter?

Evaluating your sources

The questions on the left will help you maintain your critical focus on the paper, article, webpage – whatever – you have in front of you.	**The prompts on the right** give practical help with the critical questions to ask yourself as you read.

What …?	***So what … ?***
… is it about? What kind of piece is it? Opinion? Argument? First hand research? Review..?	*First key impressions – starting with the abstract.*
Can you capture the main idea in one sentence?	*… so you know if it is relevant to your purpose.*
What theoretical and/or practical implications does this study have?	
Does the information here fit with what you know already?	*So you can draw it into your discussion – whether similar or different to other sources.*

	... is the link between your aim and their aim? *Does it address YOUR question? YOUR gap?*

	What are their credentials: qualifications? experience? perspective?

Evaluating your sources

How …?	***So what** … are the implications?*
… did they carry out their research?	*Why did they do it this way? And not another? What information is missing?*
What methodology or approach was used?	*What else do we need to know or find out?*
What are the limitations of this research?	*Can this evidence be generalised? If not, why not?*
How did you find it? By a systematic search?	*If it just popped up, you can be less confident about the quality of the research.*

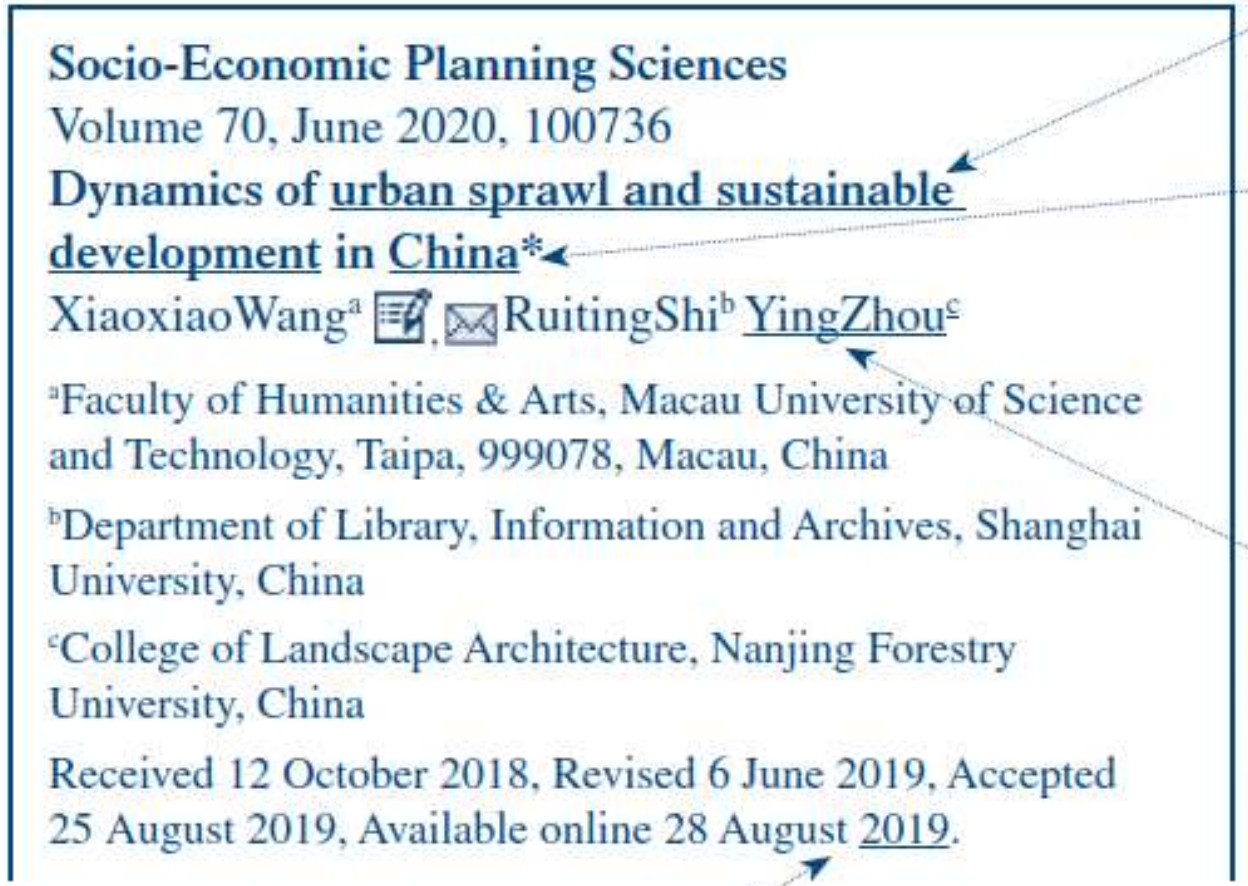
When …?	***So what** … are the implications?*
… was it published or last updated?	*In most fields, knowledge and interpretation move on quickly.*
… was the research actually carried out?	*An old source could be relevant – a benchmark or classic.*

Evaluating your sources

Where…?	***So what** … are the implications?*
…was the research carried out?	*The focus of the research may reflect the perspectives of the researchers / location / country.*
…and published? Which publisher?	*All publishers have their own criteria, standards, positions and possible agendas.*



To read or not to read?



Socio-Economic Planning Sciences
Volume 70, June 2020, 100736
Dynamics of urban sprawl and sustainable development in China*
XiaoxiaoWang[a], RuitingShi[b], YingZhou[c]

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[b]Department of Library, Information and Archives, Shanghai University, China

[c]College of Landscape Architecture, Nanjing Forestry University, China

Received 12 October 2018, Revised 6 June 2019, Accepted 25 August 2019, Available online 28 August 2019.

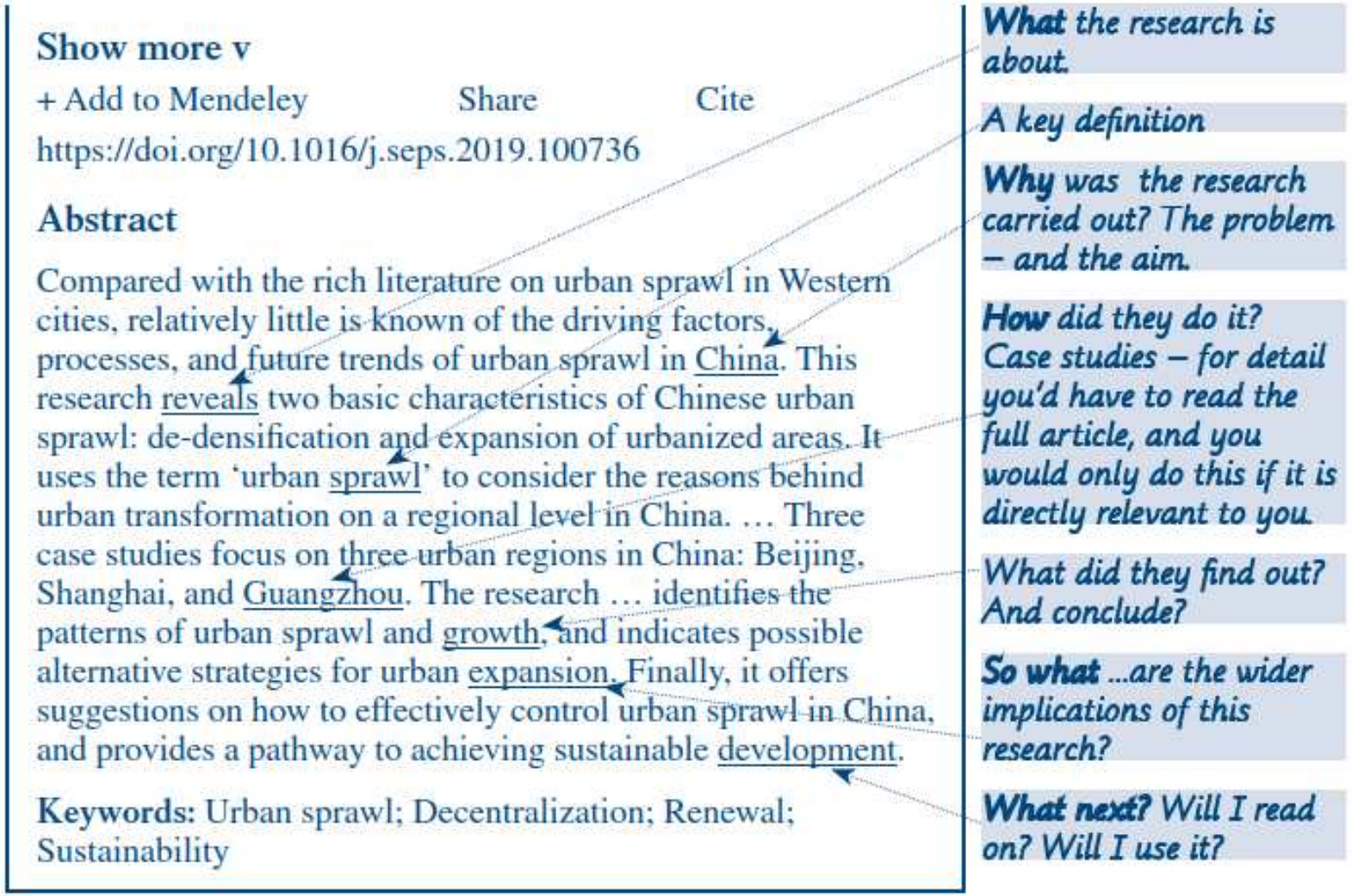
What is it about?

Where was the research carried out? Could it be relevant to my interest in Brazil?

Who are the researchers? Do they look qualified to carry out credible research? In science subjects the first author is usually the lead author, and the last is the head of the lab – equally important.
Click on the icons for more about the researchers and how the article has (or has not) been used by other researchers.

When was the research published? Online and print? And carried out? (probably 2017-18)?

To read or not to read? (cont)



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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.seps.2019.100736

Abstract

Compared with the rich literature on urban sprawl in Western cities, relatively little is known of the driving factors, processes, and future trends of urban sprawl in China. This research reveals two basic characteristics of Chinese urban sprawl: de-densification and expansion of urbanized areas. It uses the term 'urban sprawl' to consider the reasons behind urban transformation on a regional level in China. … Three case studies focus on three urban regions in China: Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. The research … identifies the patterns of urban sprawl and growth, and indicates possible alternative strategies for urban expansion. Finally, it offers suggestions on how to effectively control urban sprawl in China, and provides a pathway to achieving sustainable development.

Keywords: Urban sprawl; Decentralization; Renewal; Sustainability

***What** the research is about.*

A key definition

***Why** was the research carried out? The problem – and the aim.*

***How** did they do it? Case studies – for detail you'd have to read the full article, and you would only do this if it is directly relevant to you.*

What did they find out? And conclude?

***So what** ...are the wider implications of this research?*

***What next?** Will I read on? Will I use it?*

Critical approach to reading

- Read economically and critically
  - Focus on the specific reading that you have decided really is important and relevant to your research
- When you identify a text you want to read in full:
  - pause; don't dive in and start from the beginning

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Critical approach to reading (cont)

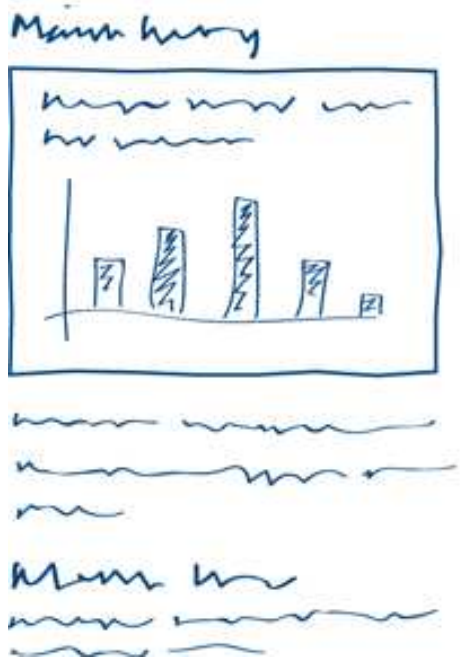
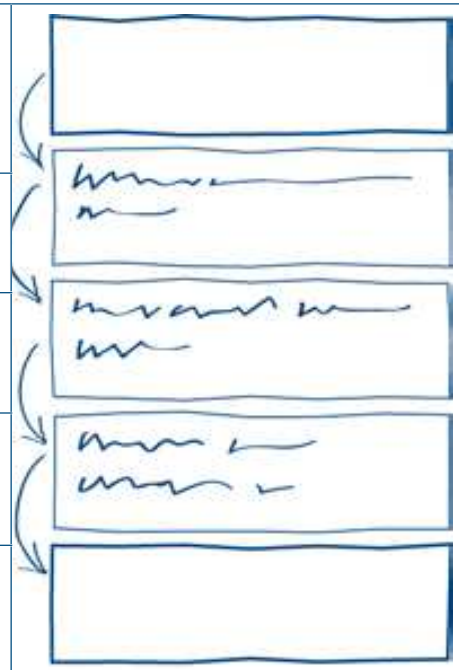
- First look back at your assignment task or essay question
- Make sure you are clearer with your focus and the sorts of materials you are looking for
- Remind yourself:
  - Why am I reading this text?
  - What do I want to get out of it?

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Critical approach to reading (cont)

1. Survey the text critically
2. Get an overview
3. Any questions?
4. Detailed read
5. Record your research footprints

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2. Getting an overview

- In a textbook chapter, start with the:
  - chapter summary or
  - first paragraph
  - last paragraph
  - headings and subheadings
  - illustrative material – diagrams, boxes, charts, pictures

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Getting an overview (cont)

- In journal articles, look at the:
  - abstract
  - first paragraph/introduction (where the author sets out their perspective)
  - last paragraph/conclusion (where the argument is restated, and linked to the wider issues)
  - figures/data/boxes/diagrams

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Getting an overview (cont)

- To follow the line of reasoning in a text, read:
  - the abstract (for a short outline)
  - introduction (the problem, approach, what lies ahead)
  - conclusion (where the author gets to, how it fits in the wider picture)
  - and, before your detailed read,
  - the first sentence of paragraphs (for the step-by-step progression of their line of reasoning).

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Critical approach to reading (cont)

- In reports, start with the:
  - abstract or executive summary
  - introduction
  - conclusions, maybe recommendations

  Leave the findings and appendices for later

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Getting an overview (cont)

- With the methodology section, ask:
  - how did the author/s set about answering the question?
  - was this a sensible approach?
  - have they shown the details of the methodology? If so, what are they?

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Getting an overview (cont)

- In policy or government documents, look to locate:
  - the brief or terms of reference (who wanted the policy and why?)
  - aim and objectives
  - specific policy relevant to your inquiry
  - then come back for the detailed reading of the specific sections

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3. Any questions?

- When you have an overview, you will know enough – and understand enough – about the text to know what you want to know more about. You will also know where to find it.
- The next step is to note down these questions, or gaps you want to fill, before you go back to the text for your detailed read.

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4. Detailed read

- Detailed read easier now that you have a sense of the whole, and can use the structure to guide your reading.
    - You are able to focus on the key bits you have identified, and what you want to get out of it.
- This approach:
    - speeds your reading; improves comprehension; and allows you place a text into the bigger picture of the question you are researching.

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5. Record you research footprints

- Keep track of your sources right from the start
- Save your resources



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Critical reading and critical appraisal

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Making notes

- When you make notes, the brain processes the information.
- It goes in as new information (data, explanation or argument), and down on your page as something you now know, understand, want to remember, and plan to use as you get to grips with your topic.

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Making notes (cont)

- Be respectful of knowledge (or argument, or explanation or whatever) and people who generated it.
- Record you sources meticulously
- Try to capture:
  - key points, key phrases of your source, and where it comes from
  - your own thoughts, observations and connections

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Tips for note making	Why?
Use colours, spacing, bullets, diagrams, arrows, sketches – whatever helps you understand the text. Go easy on the highlighter, try a pencil	◗◗ to change the format of the original to reflect how you are making sense of the information. On paper, a highlighter highlights – usually too much and you can't undo it! Electronically, you can change your mind and save highlighted bits as notes.
Avoid writing full sentences	◗◗ to leave yourself free to grasp the idea, not get bogged down in the words of the writer.
Don't copy, except for short phrases you may want to use as quotes	◗◗ so the wording of your notes is your own except where you can see from the quote marks and page number that they are not.
Leave lots of space, and experiment with styles till you find what suits you	◗◗ so you can add detail later.
Check back quickly with the original	◗◗ to make sure you haven't missed anything crucial.
Record each source, save the full reference, so you know where ideas or findings come from	◗◗ so your reader can find it ◗◗ to avoid retracing your steps later ◗◗ to get credit for the work you have done ◗◗ to give credit to authors for the work they have done.
Note key points relevant to your purpose	◗◗ to focus on what *you* want to get out of the text, not necessarily the same points or order as the author.

A short annotation: what do I include?

The full reference	
Summarise What is it about? (about 25% length)	◗ The author's purpose, aim or question ◗ Main argument, central idea, findings or conclusions ◗ What sort of text is it? General? Specific?
Evaluate What do I think about it? (about 50%)	◗ Who is it written for? ◗ Particular strengths or points of interest ◗ Similarities or differences with other things you have read, or ideas you hold yourself ◗ Any weaknesses or limitations
Reflect How might I use it? (about 25% length)	◗ How is it similar or different to other things you have read? ◗ Has the text helped you understand something better? Or see/do something differently? If so, what? ◗ How useful is it? If so, how?

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An example

Regina is researching an essay on health inequalities in the UK. Below is one annotation from her annotated bibliography.

Tuyisenge G and Goldenberg S (2021) COVID-19, structural racism, and migrant health in Canada. *The Lancet,* 397(10275): 650–2. doi.10.1016/S0140-6736(21)00215-4.

A comment piece. Powerful argument – the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in high-income countries falls disproportionately on migrant communities in 'essential' but low-paying, insecure work – a consequence of structural racism.

Readable, clearly argued and specifically evidenced, the article is directed to 'decision makers' but is accessible for the general reader as the pattern of COVID-19 emerges in real time. The case study is of Canada but applies to other high-income countries. Useful refs (economic, public health, policy).

Obvious perhaps but shocking – it's known that BAME communities are harder hit by COVID-19, but unpicking 'structural racism' and links to employment/poverty/housing brings a sharp perspective. Key? in my assignment on health inequalities. Follow up.

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http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)00215-4/fulltext

... however, they did find that the use of probiotics in AAR patients is safe (Butler et al. 2012).

Rajkumar et al. (2020) concluded that probiotics were effective in reducing AAR but not necessarily in ICU.

Although the trial was limited to 38 patients, the results showed that the probiotics drink was effective in reducing ...

It does not provide the most up-to-date evidence ... but it does highlight the disparities ...

More research would be needed with controlled variables.

... there is not enough evidence to justify using it in ICU ...

There was a 9% reported dropout rate of patients who were not consulted for follow up or not assessed.

Plagiarism

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What is plagiarism?

- Taking ideas or words from a source (e.g., a book or journal) without giving credit (acknowledgement) to the author.
- Theft; academic crime

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What is plagiarism? (cont)

- Students are expected to show that they have read the principal authorities on a subject – by giving citations.

BUT

- To explain these ideas in their own words and come to their own original conclusions

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What is plagiarism? (cont)

- Why should you avoid plagiarism?
  - To show you understand the rules of the academic community
  - Copying the work of others will not help you develop your own understanding
  - Plagiarism is easily detected by teachers and computer software
  - Plagiarism may lead to failing a course or even being dismissed from the university!

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Acknowledging sources

- Summary and citation

  Muyinda (2022) claims that extant disparities in smoking between urban and rural areas in Uganda are largely explained by sociocultural factors.

- Quotation and citation

  According to Muyinda: ‘sociocultural factors largely explain the observed disparities in smoking between urban and rural areas.’ (Muyinda, 2022)

- These are in-text citations linked to a list of references at the end of the main text

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Degrees of plagiarism

- Copying a paragraph, but changing a few words and giving a citation?
- Cutting and pasting a short article from a website, with no citation?
- Taking two paragraphs from a classmate's essay, without citation?
- Taking a graph from a textbook, giving the source?
- Taking a quotation from a source, giving a citation but not using quotation marks?

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Degrees of plagiarism (cont)

- Using something that you think of as general knowledge (e.g., the ownership of mobile phones is increasing worldwide)
- Using a paragraph from an essay you wrote and had marked the previous semester, without citation.
- Discussing an essay topic with a group of classmates and using some of their ideas in your own work?
- Giving a citation for some information but misspelling the author's name?

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Avoiding plagiarism: Summarize and paraphrase

- Do not overuse quotations
- Learn to paraphrase and summarise to include other writers' ideas in your work
- **Paraphrasing**
  - rewriting a text so that the language is significantly different while the content stays the same
- **Summarizing**
  - reducing the length of a text but retaining the main points

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RAILWAY MANIAS

In 1830 there were a few dozen miles of railways in all the world – chiefly consisting of the line from Liverpool to Manchester. By 1840 there were over 4,500 miles, by 1850 over 23,500. Most of them were projected in a few bursts of speculative frenzy known as the 'railway manias' of 1835–1837 and especially in 1844–1847; most of them were built in large part with British capital, British iron, machines and know-how. These investment booms appear irrational, because in fact few railways were much more profitable to the investor than other forms of enterprise, most yielded quite modest profits and many none at all: in 1855 the average interest on capital sunk in the British railways was a mere 3.7 per cent.

(From *The Age of Revolution* by Eric Hobsbawm, 1995, p. 45)

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(a) Between 1830 and 1850 there was very rapid development in railway construction world wide. Two periods of especially feverish growth were 1835–1837 and 1844–1847. It is hard to understand the reason for this intense activity, since railways were not particularly profitable investments and some produced no return at all (Hobsbawm, 1995: 45).

(b) There were only a few dozen miles of railways in 1830, including the Liverpool to Manchester line. But by 1840 there were over 4,500 miles and over 23,500 by 1850. Most of them were built in large part with British capital, British iron, machines and know-how, and most of them were projected in a few bursts of speculative frenzy known as the 'railway manias' of 1835–1837 and especially in 1844–1847. Because most yielded quite modest profits and many none at all these investment booms appear irrational. In fact few railways were much more profitable to the investor than other forms of enterprise (Hobsbawm, 1995: 45).

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(c) As Hobsbawm (1995) argues, nineteenth century railway mania was partly irrational: 'because in fact few railways were much more profitable to the investor than other forms of enterprise, most yielded quite modest profits and many none at all: in 1855 the average interest on capital sunk in the British railways was a mere 3.7 per cent' (Hobsbawm, 1995: 45).

(d) Globally, railway networks increased dramatically from 1830 to 1850; the majority in short periods of 'mania' (1835–1837 and 1844–1847). British technology and capital were responsible for much of this growth, yet the returns on the investment were hardly any better than comparable business opportunities (Hobsbawm, 1895: 45).

(e) The dramatic growth of railways between 1830 and 1850 was largely achieved using British technology. However, it has been claimed that much of this development was irrational because few railways were much more profitable to the investor than other forms of enterprise; most yielded quite modest profits and many none at all.

	Plagiarised or acceptable?	Reason
(a)		
(b)		
(c)		
(d)		
(e)		

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Avoid plagiarism:
Develop good study habits

- Plan your work carefully so you do not have to write the essay at the last minute
- Take care to make notes in your own words, not copying from the source
- Keep a record of all the sources you use
- Make sure all your in-text citation are included in the bibliography
- ....

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Getting critical in writing

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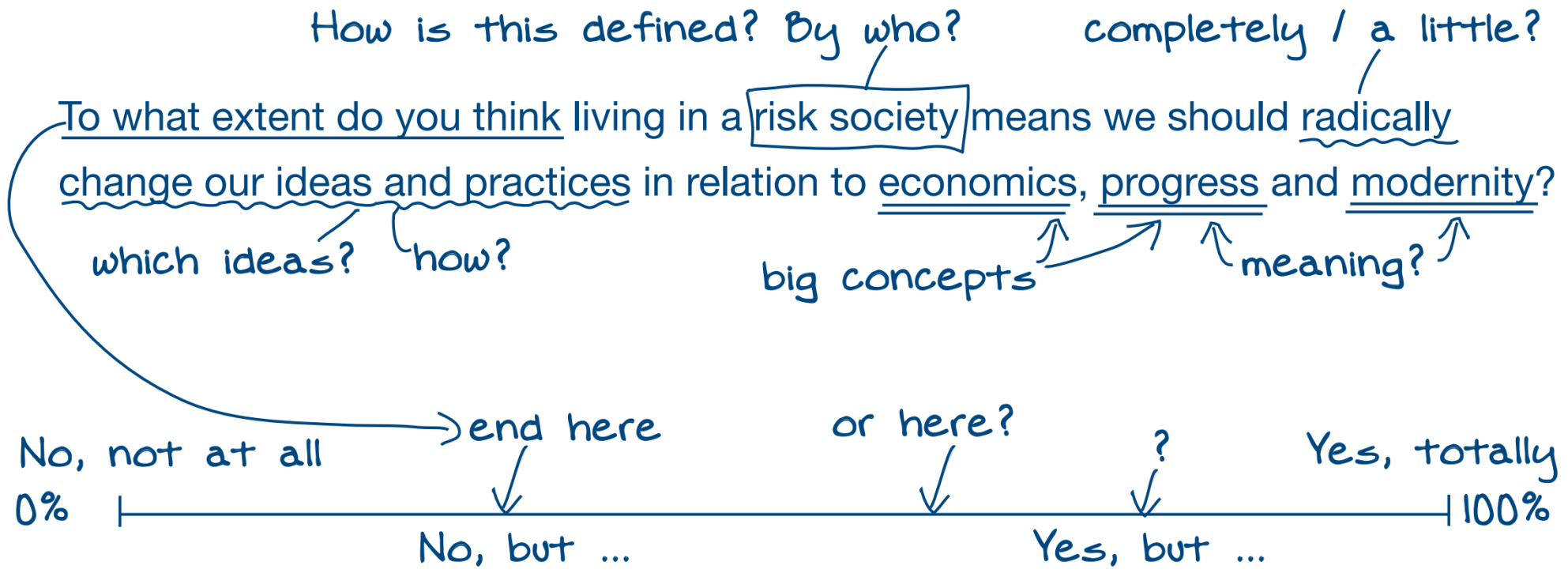
You've read, now what?

- Critical writing is synthesis with a purpose.
- The question is there to:
  - help you think critically
  - stop you writing pages of all-I-know-about
  - guide you in focusing and selecting
  - draw your attention to conflicts of evidence, interpretation and argument in the topic area

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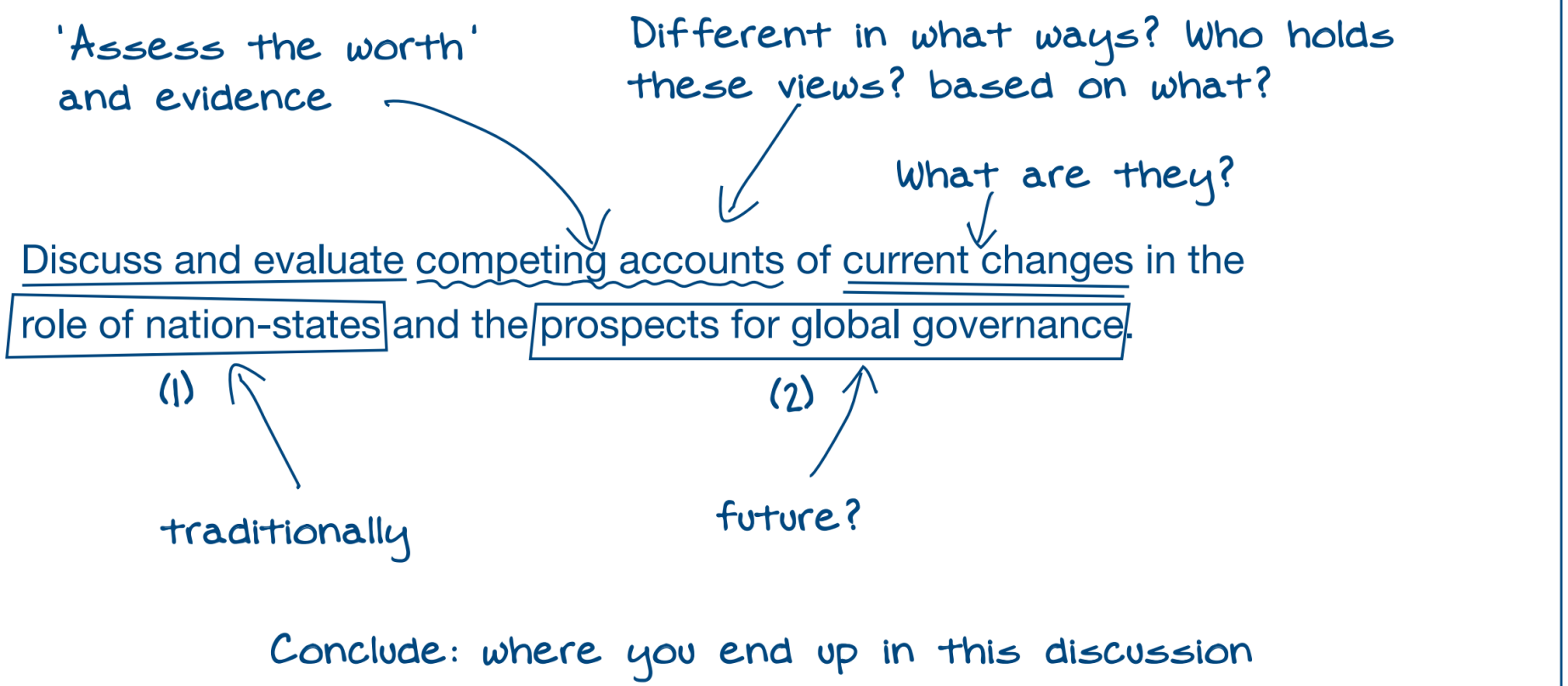
The explicit question

How far … ? *How convincing … ?* *How successful … ?* *Do you agree that … ?* *In what ways … ?* *What is the role of … ?* *Can … ?* ***To what extent … ?***	**The challenge here** is to pick the question apart, ask questions about it, and plan how to answer it. You show your critical approach by developing an argument, linking each point to one or other aspect of the question, and reaching a conclusion. The answer will usually be on a spectrum between 'Not at all' and 'Yes totally'. If it were one of these extremes, there would be little point in asking the question!



The instruction 'question'

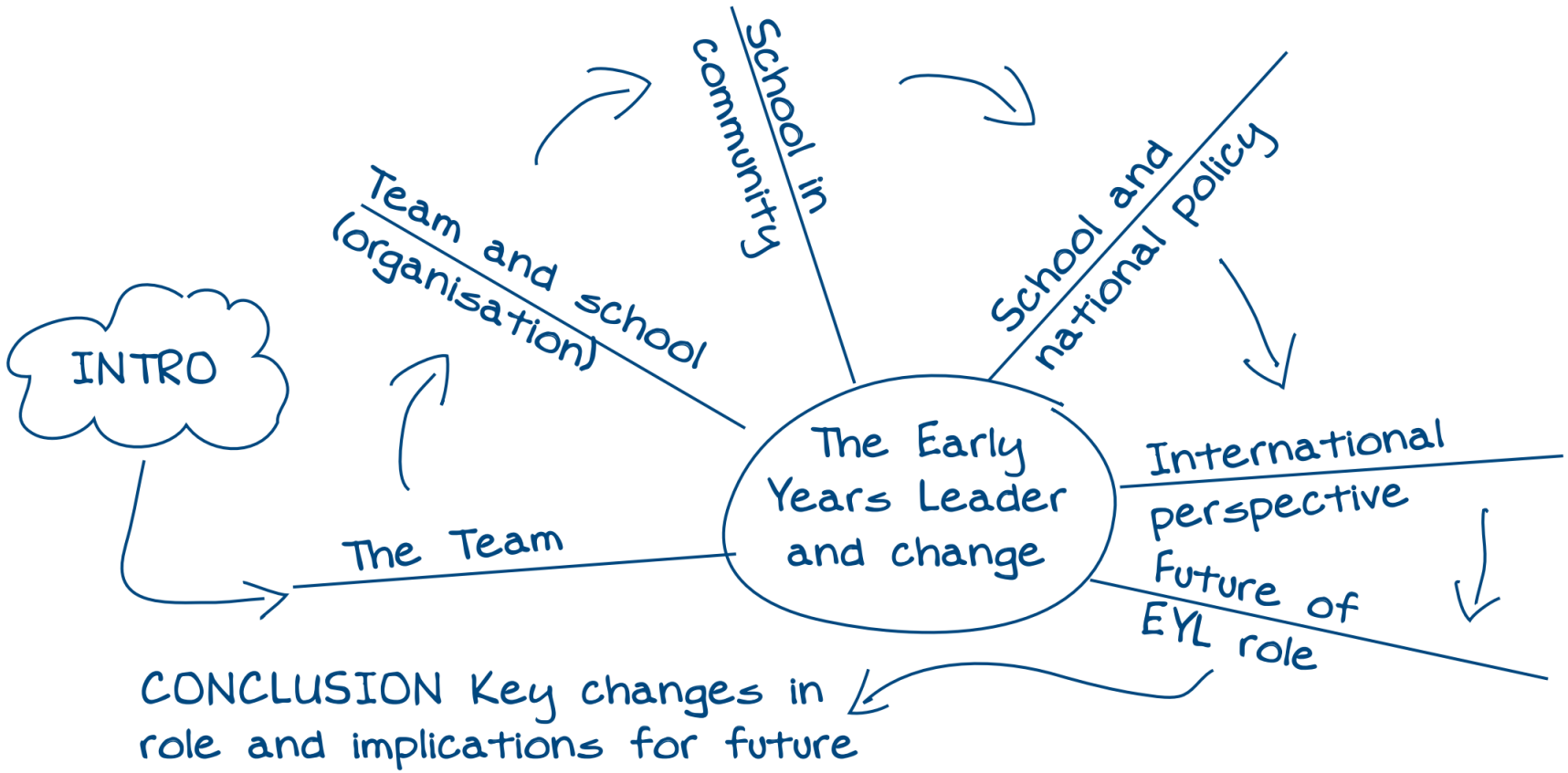
Analyse the … *Compare and contrast the approaches to …* *Consider the impact of …* ***Discuss and evaluate …***	**The challenge here** is to appreciate what the 'instruction' word is asking for, and show your critical understanding of the topic by picking your way through the complexities. You show your critical awareness by doing exactly what it says!



The bald title 'question'

Future developments in the airline sector The equality and difference debate Going green: introducing an environmental management plan in the hotel industry	**The challenge here** is to create a structure for your essay by pulling out the headings hidden within the broad topic title, and picking out the debates within these specific areas. Show your critical understanding of these debates.

The Early Years Leader and change



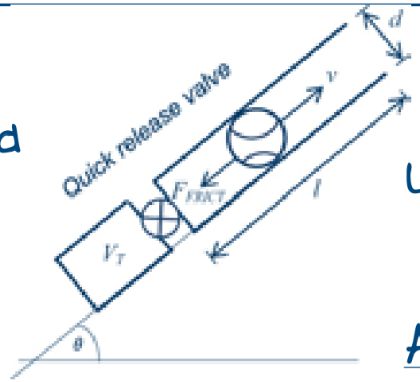
The modelling 'question'

Derive and explain … *Find the dimensions which will use the minimum …*	**The challenge here** is use the information provided in the questions to guide your model solution. There is unlikely to be a 'right answer'. Your results will be part of a methodical process, defining, deriving, assuming and testing it out. You show your critical awareness by choosing an appropriate model, stating and justifying assumptions made, explaining your results and considering limitations of your approach.

Detail your formulae and notation.

State **how** and **why** you formulated the model in that way.

Justify your assumptions.



Use notation given.

Answer the question!

Derive and explain a mathematical model of the trajectory of a tennis ball fired from a tennis ball launcher. Use this model to calculate the pressure and angle of the inclination required to clear a net of a given height and to hit a target X metres away.

What is/are your model solutions?
What results did this provide? What conclusions can be drawn?
What are the limitations of your model?

How might these be addressed moving forward?

‘Argument’ in academic writing

- Show the angle or stance you are taking on an issue
  - Best done after reading, conducting research and reflecting on the evidence
- An argument essay is to **convince your reader not only that you know what the arguments are, but that you understand them and see the ‘weight’ of each**.
- You demonstrate ability to develop your own line of argument or ‘position’ in relation to the debate and bring it to a conclusion at the end.

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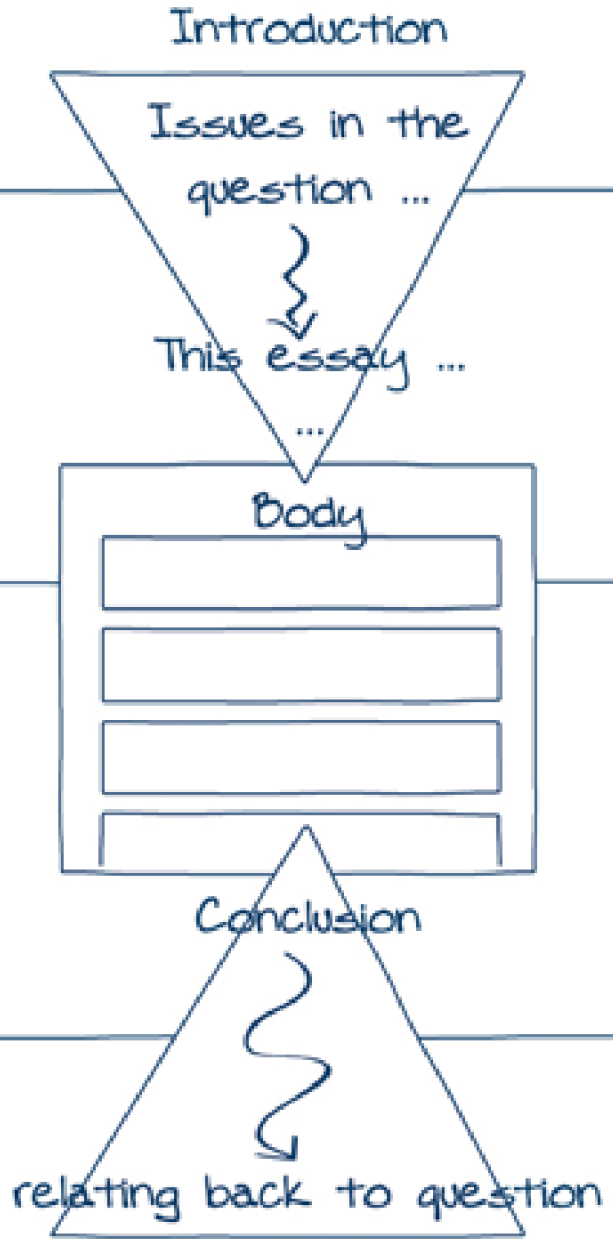
Argument essay structure

Pre-university

Introduction
- Issues in the question
- *This essay….*

Body
Arguments
- for
- against

Conclusion
- Which arguments you think are stronger



At university

Introduction
- Identify relevant issues in the question
- Explain what your argument will be
- *This essay…* (main points)

Body
- Set out main reasons for your argument
- Develop each reason in one paragraph
- Point out arguments against your line, and show why you think they are less convincing

Conclusion
- Restate your argument
- Summarise what you covered
- Show what this means in relation to the question and the bigger picture

Critical writing...

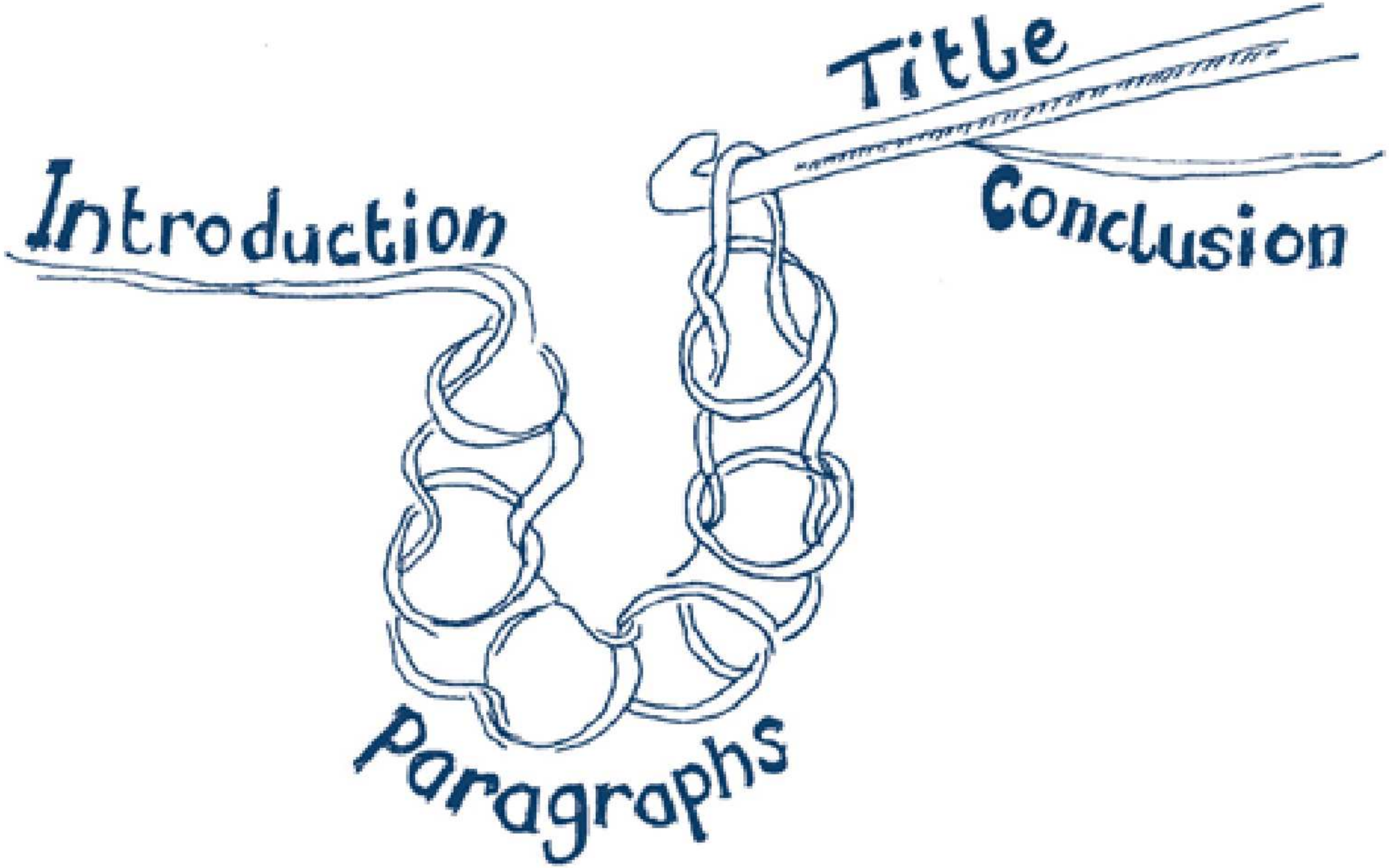
- Criticality should run throughout:
  - in pinpointing the question,
  - unpacking the question(s)
  - setting the question yourself
  - finding your own ‘position’ in the debates or complexities in the topic
- You argument lies in finding your sense of direction or purpose through it all from start to finish

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Writing paragraphs

- Written work is divided into paragraphs
- Mastering paragraph writing is essential in showing your critical skills
- In effect, a paragraph is the **unit of argument**
- Each paragraph is an interlocking link in your essay, leading to a conclusion

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Title
Introduction
Conclusion
Paragraphs

Paragraphs have a structure

- Each paragraph develops one main idea or point
- The main idea is usually expressed clearly in one sentence, the first, or topic sentence
- Paragraphs have a beginning, a middle and end.
  - Middle sentences explain, develop, illustrate or modify the main idea in the topic sentence.
  - Last sentence often returns to the idea in the topic sentence to show how it has developed

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Paragraph structure has a purpose

- Read
  - the main idea is first, and you know that this idea will be developed before you move on
- Plan:
  - each paragraph develops a single point.
- Write:
  - new point, new paragraph.
  - start each paragraph with a clear statement of the point you are making, then add detail.

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How to write a paragraph

❶ **Start with the topic sentence** to express the main idea or point.

❷ **Explain** or **define any abstract, key** or **problematic terms** to clarify the topic sentence.

❸ **Show your evidence** to support your main point or argument in the topic sentence

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How to write a paragraph (cont)

❹ **Comment on the evidence** to show how it supports or develops the main idea.

If appropriate, mention other evidence (examples/studies/experiments/interpretations) to widen the discussion.

❺ Conclude. Look back to your topic sentence and ask yourself:

How have I moved on/developed the main idea in it?

Where am I going next?

Then write the last sentence.

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The Early Years Leader (EYL) needs to have an understanding of how teams work if they are to be effective in managing staff groups and change. An effective team will most likely go through stages of development (Hartley 1997). These stages have been described by Tuckman and Jensen (1977) as 'Forming' (a group gets to know each other), 'Storming' (some initial conflict develops), 'Norming' (group norms are established), 'Performing' (the group communicates and collaborates well) and 'Adjourning' (the group disbands). This cycle is repeated when new objectives are adopted or there is a change in team members, but to be able to perform to its optimum, a team needs to go through these stages to reach the 'performing' stage. It is the role of the Early Years Leader (EYL) to move the team through these stages trying to balance individual, professional and organisational needs and development.

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1. Topic sentence

2. Explain/define

3. Show your evidence

4. Comment

5. Conclude

Check your paragraphs

- Check the paragraph against:
  - a paragraph of something you are reading
  - a paragraph you are writing
- Don’t expect it to tally exactly, but you should be able to see a structure, with the topic sentence clearly stated at the beginning and elements of the ‘plan’ in the rest of the paragraph – even if it is just 1 or 2 words

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What happens when paragraphs are not structured well?

- The *So what?* Problem
  - You have main point, topic sentence (1), explanation (2), illustration, explanation, evidence (3):

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1. Topic sentence (main point)

2. Explanation

3. Illustration, explanation, evidence

But then you stop and move on to the next point in a new paragraph:

The Early Years Foundation Stage places a great deal of emphasis on …

What happens when paragraphs are not structured well? (cont)

- There is no Number 4.
- No comment from you, no evaluation, no evidence to the reader that you have understood what you have set out, no indication of how this evidence relates to the point you are making – and therefore no argument.
- The reader is left thinking '*So...?*' or 'But what does this tell us about ...?' or even 'So what?'

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The remedy...

This writer ...
evaluates the usefulness of these ideas, picks out key aspects

4 This cycle is repeated when new objectives are adopted or there is a change in team members, but to be able to perform to its optimum, a team needs to go through these stages to reach the 'performing' stage. 4 It is the role of the Early Years Leader (EYL) to move the team through these stages trying to 5 balance individual, professional and organisational needs and development.

applies the theory to the situation

and links it back to the topic sentence

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The remedy (cont)

- You can show that you have a perspective on the material you discuss by:
  - highlighting the differences between two studies
  - showing that you understand the points made, or the weight of argument, e.g., ‘key to this is...’ ‘It seems that...’
  - connecting with the issues implicit in the question

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How long is a paragraph?

- Long enough to develop a point or idea in the way outlined in the paragraph plan
- For students, a good guideline is 5-8 sentences.
- The upside down test!

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Satisfying customers should be the overriding aim of marketing activity. To what extent does the literature?

This definition covers the important point that the needs and objectives of both the customer and the organisation must be satisfied. Satisfying customers should be an essential part of marketing activity for it is cheaper to satisfy and thereby retain existing customers than it is to obtain new ones (Oliver 1999). According to Masterson st al (2006) it costs approximately five times more to attract new customers that it does to keep an existing customer happy. Conversely it needs to be considered that even within a customer base not all patrons will be profitable to the company. In retail banking for example, the This definition covers the important point that the needs and objectives of both the customer and the organisation must be satisfied. Satisfying customers should be an essential part of marketing activity for it is cheaper to satisfy and thereby retain existing customers than it is to obtain new ones (Oliver 1999). According to Masterson st al (2006) it costs approximately five times more to attract new customers that it does to keep an existing customer happy. Conversely it needs to be considered that even within a customer base not all patrons will be profitable to the company. In retail banking for example, the This definition covers the important point that the needs and objectives of both the customer and the organisation must be satisfied. Satisfying customers should be an essential part of marketing activity for it is cheaper to satisfy and thereby retain existing customers than it is to obtain new ones (Oliver 1999). According to Masterson st al (2006) it costs approximately five times more to attract new customers that it does to keep an existing customer happy. Conversely it needs to be considered that even within a customer base not all patrons will be profitable to the company. In retail banking for example, the This definition covers the important point that the needs and objectives of both the customer and the organisation must be satisfied. Satisfying customers should be an essential part of marketing activity for it is cheaper to satisfy and thereby retain existing customers than it is to obtain new ones (Oliver 1999). According to Masterson st al (2006) it costs approximately five times more to attract new customers that it does to keep an existing customer happy. Conversely it needs to be considered that even within a customer base not all patrons will be profitable to the company. In retail banking for example, the This definition covers the important point that the needs and objectives of both the customer and the organisation must be satisfied. Satisfying customers should be an essential part of marketing activity for it is cheaper to satisfy and thereby retain existing customers than it is to obtain new ones (Oliver 1999). According to Masterson st al (2006) it costs approximately five times more to attract new customers that it does to keep an existing customer happy. Conversely it needs to be considered that even within a customer base not all patrons will be profitable to the company. In retail banking for example, the This definition covers the important point that the needs and objectives of both the customer and the organisation must be satisfied. Satisfying customers should be an essential part of marketing activity for it is cheaper to satisfy and thereby retain existing customers than it is to obtain new ones (Oliver 1999). According to Masterson st al (2006) it costs approximately five times more to attract new customers that it does to keep an existing customer happy. Conversely it needs to be considered that even within a customer base not all patrons will be profitable to the company. In retail banking for example, the This definition covers the important point that the needs and objectives of both the customer and the organisation must be satisfied. Satisfying customers should be an essential part of marketing activity for it is cheaper to satisfy and thereby retain existing customers than it is to obtain new ones (Oliver 1999). According to Masterson st al (2006) it costs approximately five times more to attract new customers that it does to keep an existing customer happy. Conversely it needs to be considered that even within a customer base not all patrons will be profitable to the company. In retail banking for example, the

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Paragraph length (cont)

- Big blocks of text in first page most off-putting.
- Indication that your argument is not well-structured into separate points; everything is blurred together

Remedy?

- Read through carefully, spotting when you move onto a new point, and make this a new paragraph
- Check you have clear topic sentences

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Paragraph length (cont)

- Second text off-putting too.
- A ‘shopping list’ approach to points and ideas.
- You cannot develop a point properly in one or two sentences

Remedy?

- It may be that some of your mini-bites belong together. Run them together to form a paragraph.
- Or may be that you have lots of points, each a topic sentence in itself. Try using the paragraph plan to develop each point.

How should well-structured paragraphs appear?

- Move down the page; look long enough to develop an idea but not so long that they merge ideas or ramble
- Allow for differences between different sections of your essay
- Well-structured paragraphs essential in demonstrating your ability to see key points and to set out a coherent argument or account
- These qualities are fundamental to critical thinking, analysis and writing

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Writing for a critical reader

- Gear your writing to whoever will read your essay – critical reader, lecturer, tutor etc.
- If guidance given is less explicit, pick up clues from what you have been told: revisit slides, read essential and recommended materials, look at examples, check feedback from previous work, etc

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‘Tell me more...’

- Writing leaves a reader thinking like:
  - where are you in all this?
  - where is your voice, your comment, your understanding of why it matters?
  - tell me more...

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Critical writing 1: '*Evidence … ?*' Show your evidence

Even though women have a guaranteed job, after maternity leave they often find themselves competing against their replacement on their return.

For your redraft: Check you have good evidence for this comment. If not, take it out – it may not be essential to your wider argument.

A **critical thinker** will make sure their statements are based on **evidence** the reader can check.

*A tutor may comment **'Evidence??'** I'd like to know how you know this. Common sense? Personal experience? Neither of these are the sorts of evidence you need to support an assertion like this.*

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Critical writing 2: '*Not a credible source …* ' Use reliable sources

Men are often considered to be more computer literate, which enables them to understand and do things at a faster rate than women (Donoghue 2017).

For your redraft: Think hard about whether this is a point that helps your overall argument. If you still want to make it, do more extensive research to satisfy yourself as to whether there is good evidence for your statement.

A **critical thinker** will **ask questions** about the quality of their sources, and not use material with weak evidence.

Tutor comment: 'Not a credible source.' Every reader will want to check your source for this (contentious) statement! Your reference shows that it was 'Travel Weekly', which is not a reliable source for a statement like this! It won't be based on high quality research.

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Critical writing 3: '*So … ?*' Apply your understanding

Letbridge (2011) argues that communication skills support and pervade the whole concept of working in partnership. Moreover, professionals are less effective on their service users' behalf if they cannot communicate precisely and persuasively (Gurzo 2014). Rajkumar (2019) comments that to …

For your redraft: Take a deep breath and talk to your reader. Explain the implications of these observations for work with clients.

Letbridge (2011) argues that communication skills support and pervade the whole concept of working in partnership. **In a multidisciplinary team …** Gurzo (2014) **observes that** professionals are less effective on their service users' behalf if they cannot communicate precisely and persuasively. **In care settings where staff come from many cultural backgrounds, language is …** Rajkumar (2019) argues that to …

A **critical thinker** will **apply** their reading to their situation, not just describe it.

*A tutor might think '**So ...??**' I can see you have read widely and summarise key points well, but where are you going with it? How does this relate to practice?*

*Deepen your discussion by showing how the point **applies** in a practical context.*

*Introduce your source as soon as you start to **discuss** their point.*

*Don't let this important point slide by! Add your comment to show how it **applies** in practice.*

*Show you can see the **debate** – if this author is proposing one approach, the chances are there are other possible approaches.*

Critical writing 4: *Quote hopping!* Tell us why the quote is important

Bowlby's theory of attachment showed that 'the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother or mother substitute… ' (1982 p. 11). Rutter (1981) found 'the child is more likely to develop deviant behaviour' (p. 18) …

For your redraft: Do some thinking. Explain the differences between these writers in your own words. Too many quotes make your writing disjointed, and the reader can't see what interests you in the discussion. Cut down on the quotes drastically.

In his theory of attachment, Bowlby (1982) stressed the importance of a 'warm, intimate and continuous' relationship (p. 11) with an adult. He did not insist that this should be the mother: it could be a 'mother substitute'. This is important in any discussion of the role of parents and carers in the development of young children … Rutter (1981) focused on what happens when this relationship is disrupted … Neither argued that the mother should be the exclusive carer …

A **critical thinker** will draw sources together, linking them to their interest and discussion. They will only **quote** key, special words, and then **comment**, making sure that their own voice comes through.

*A tutor might think: where are you going with this? You **hop from quote** to quote describing what each writer says. Don't be nervous about **summarising** and **commenting** on theories and findings. **Your voice is missing**.*

In your first draft you hadn't shown what interests you in this debate. Your redraft shows it's the roles of mother and carer.

***Summary** and comment.*

*A glimpse of **argument** developing …*

Your focus, Your voice

Synthesis linking two sources.

Use feedback!

- ‘well-observed point’
- ‘good use of reference’
- ‘intelligent application of a point from research to a particular situation’
- ‘this is a jargon term’ if you don’t explain or reference it
- ‘what are the implications for …?
- ‘link your discussion of X to the topic’

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As a critical reader of your own writing, try to:

- **Ask questions**: you could start with critical questions and adapt them
- Look for **evidence** for statement or assertions
- Check for **assumptions** and **personal views** with no wider basis in evidence
- Check for sweeping statements and **generalizations**

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As a critical reader of your own writing, try to:

- Probe the **knowledge** base of the writing – superficial or in-depth? Do you really understand it? (If you don't as a writer, your reader certainly won't!)
- Find your **voice** as a writer
- *Tell me why it matters or how it is different. Explain the implications, applications, uses*. **Talk to your reader.**

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What will I be looking for in your essays?

- Do you have a good discussion of theoretical concepts?
- Have you rightly used appropriate evidence to illustrate arguments?
- Do you show good critical ability and ability to appreciate limitations of techniques used (and the impact this has on the overall reliability of the conclusions made in the study)?
- Are your sources well referenced, using articles from the reading list plus other relevant sources including relevant peer-reviewed articles?

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What will I be looking for in your essays?

- Are arguments are succinctly and unequivocally stated in the introduction?
- Does your essay show a high level of knowledge and understanding of the debates and advances in a coherent and convincing argument?
- Have you identified all the relevant debates and theories surrounding this subject?
- Have you read extensively and used empirical evidence that you have found to support your arguments, and in your analysis...?

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What does critical writing look like?

Extract 1

Although empowerment is a management initiative, this does not necessarily mean that empowerment is not of benefit to employees. Hertzberg's two-factor theory of motivation at work (Hertzberg et al. 1959 cited in Mullins 2010) clearly shows that responsibility and recognition are motivators that lead to job satisfaction. The problem is that not all employees can be categorised under Herzberg's framework. Many employees only work to earn money. Merton (2011) labels these as 'externally committed' (p. 37). When trying to empower staff, these are the people that …

*A thoughtful, critical comment in the **topic sentence**, direct from the writer: **critical analysis**.*

*This short summary from a key source shows the writer has **understood**, and **selected** only the key point needed for their discussion.*

*A '**Number 4**' comment (from paragraph plan)! The writer's own comment, identifying the limitations of this theory, and moving swiftly to explore the theory of another author: **critical analysis**.*

*Good **synthesis** linking ideas and theories in a discussion.*

What does critical writing look like?

Extract 2

There is considerable consensus about the impact of early experience, although there have been some dissenting voices. These include Robbins (2010), who questioned the extent of parental influence, and considered the influence of peers to be greater. This, however, is unlikely to be the case in the first few years of life. Kagan (1998) was a strong opponent of the notion of 'infant determinism' (p. 62), and …

*A clear **topic sentence**, making the writer's point for the paragraph. It indicates **wide reading** in order to be able to say this with authority: introducing **evidence**.*

*A short, sharp **summary** showing the writer's understanding of these authors.*

*A '**Number 4**' comment! The writer has reflected on the theory and made a brief comment of their own before moving on to the next theorist: **synthesis**.*

What does critical writing look like?

Extract 3

The importance of missing data cannot be neglected. All the subjects who participated in the present study completed the first testing session … However, eleven out of seventeen participants completed the second testing session (on blood glucose concentration measures) and only four were in the MA group. It is reasonable to assume that if all volunteers had completed both testing sessions, the results might have been different to those reported.

*A clear **topic sentence** stating the focus for the paragraph, showing **critical awareness** of the importance of missing data.*

*Transparently states the impact of reduced number of participants on the **overall reliability** of the conclusions of the study.*

*Shares reasoning with the reader - having provided the **evidence for this conclusion**.*

What does critical writing look like?

Extract 4

In this essay I argue that it is not possible to solve global environmental problems within the structure of the global political economy because the principles which underpin the competitive free market unavoidably exploit the environment. However … it is important to consider what intervention in the global economy might involve, and what it might achieve.

*To set out an **argument** so clearly in the introduction, the writer must have read and thought a lot before they begin. Issues are never clear cut. This writer will pick their way carefully, setting out their **line of reasoning**, and consider **conflicting evidence**. The conclusion will show where they sit in the debate and why.*

*The writer uses **language** carefully and critically. Not 'solve' but it might 'achieve' something.*

What is an argument?

- A **claim** defended with **reasons**.
- Argument = premise(s) + conclusion
- **Premises**: statements offered as evidence or reasons why we should accept another statement, the conclusion.
- **Conclusion**: statement in an argument that the premises are intended to prove or support.

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Statements

- A sentence that can be viewed as either true or false.
  - Uganda is in Buganda
  - Kampala is in Uganda
  - God does not exist?!
  - Abortion is morally wrong?!
- Statements can be about subjective matters or objectively verifiable matters of fact

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Rhetorical questions

- Sentence with a grammatical form of a question but meant to be understood as a statement.

  Mathew, you should quit smoking. Don't you agnize its deleterious effects on your health?

- The speaker is making an assertion: that smoking is dangerous to one's health.
- The assertion is a premise to support the conclusion that Mathew should quit smoking.

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Ought imperative

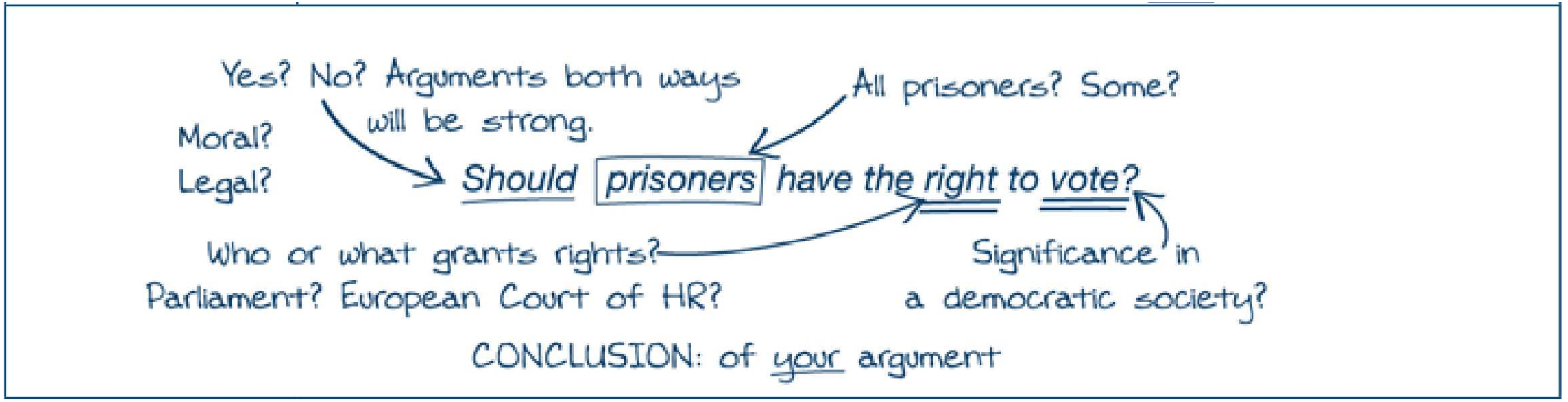
- A sentence that has the form of an imperative or command but is intended to assert a value or ought judgment about what is good or bad.

  "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Matthew 7:1-2

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Can...? Do...? Should...?

- A question may look simple but you need to pick at it and draw out the content and debates.



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Do the groundwork: what are the arguments?

FOR	AGAINST
◗ European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) says prisoners should retain basic human rights (including the right to vote) ◗ Linking ban to imprisonment is arbitrary – what if someone is in for a short time? ◗ Right to vote helps prisoners to reintegrate eventually into society ◗ Prisoners' views should be represented in Parliament	◗ Loss of vote a deterrent to future offending – part of punishment ◗ Prisoners should experience the 'civic death': they've acted against the interests of society ◗ Losing the right to vote will help prisoners regret their decisions, and so rehabilitate ◗ Prisoners can't be trusted to make good political decisions

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Should prisoners have the right to vote?

Essay 1

Introduction

- The debate: involves different views about punishment
- *This essay argues that denying voting rights should form no part of punishment …*

Body: arguments

- Will it rehabilitate? No, because …
- Prison is punishment enough … no need to deny all human rights
- Crime is complex … link to social and economic factors …

Conclusion

No good reason to deny prisoners the vote … not to be decided by 'popular punitiveness' …

Essay 2

Introduction

- Prisoners have broken the law …
- *This essay argues that prisoners should not have the right to vote: 'civic death'*

Body: arguments

- Loss of participation in society should include loss of right to vote: a 'privilege' not a 'right'
- Human rights are not clear cut
- A deterrent …
- What about victims?

Conclusion

Good reasons for not giving prisoners the right to vote; Parliament can ignore the ECHR

Essay 3

Introduction

- Good arguments for and against – a complex issue
- *This essay will argue in favour of the right to vote, but only to an extent …*

Body: arguments

- Strength of argument depends on crime committed …
- Human rights not absolute …
- Different approach: allow the vote but take it away for serious crimes. This meets the ECHR ruling …

Conclusion

Not a simple issue: thinking needs to focus on best fit for individual and society …

Language of argument

- Consider...
  - Have you overstated? Gone beyond what you meant, been too definite?
- Try this...
  - Choose words that convey the right degree of certainty for the point you are making.
  - Consider the impact of: *has been describes as/may be/likely to/can/can be seen as/implies that/does not necessarily mean that.*

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Language of argument (cont)

- Consider...
  - Does your writing flow? Do you make it easy for your reader to follow your argument?
- Try this...
  - Use ‘signposting’ or linking words to help your reader:
    - Follow the flow of your argument: *first/second/next*
    - See the connections between ideas and anticipate the direction you are going in: *however/therefore/so/for example*.

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Language of argument (cont)

- Consider...
  - Do the words you use to introduce a source show your ‘position’ on the author and the issue?
- Try this...
  - Choose your verb carefully when you summarise a point from a source: *points out/argues/maintains/claims/concludes/suggests*

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Stepping up the stairway to critical thinking

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Describe

- Understand
  - Comprehend the key points, assumptions, arguments and evidence presented
- Process
  - Take in the information – what you have read, heard, seen or done

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Describe (cont)

- Describing is an essential first step
- You are required to go beyond this, however
- Stop!
- Step back and get a perspective
- Step up to analysis

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Analyze

- ...resolution of something complex into its simple elements
- Analysis is the foundation to critical thinking
- Examine how the key components fit together and relate to each other
- *Look down on the situation, see the themes emerging from the story; pick out key points that relate to each other and to the question or task you are working on*

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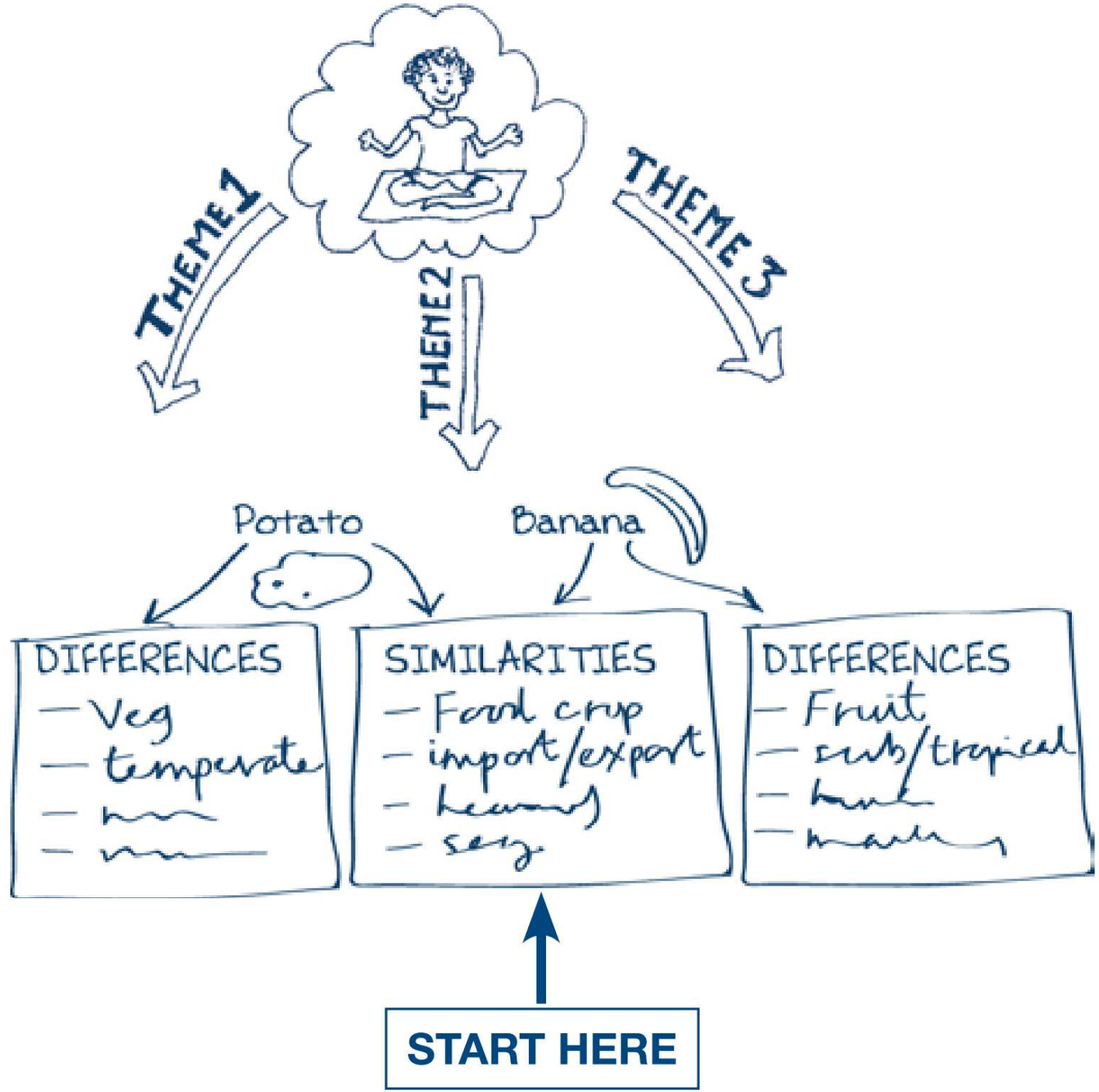
Compare (and contrast)

- ...leads to analysis of themes that emerge from the groundwork analysis of similarities and differences
- If you are asked to **compare**, you will also **contrast**:
  - in things that are very different, the similarities are interesting
  - in things that are very similar, the differences are more interesting
- Explore **implications** of similarities and differences:
  - why are they important, what do they mean, what difference will they make

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Step 2: Identify the themes: analyse and discuss

Step 1: Do the groundwork: list similarities and differences



Synthesize

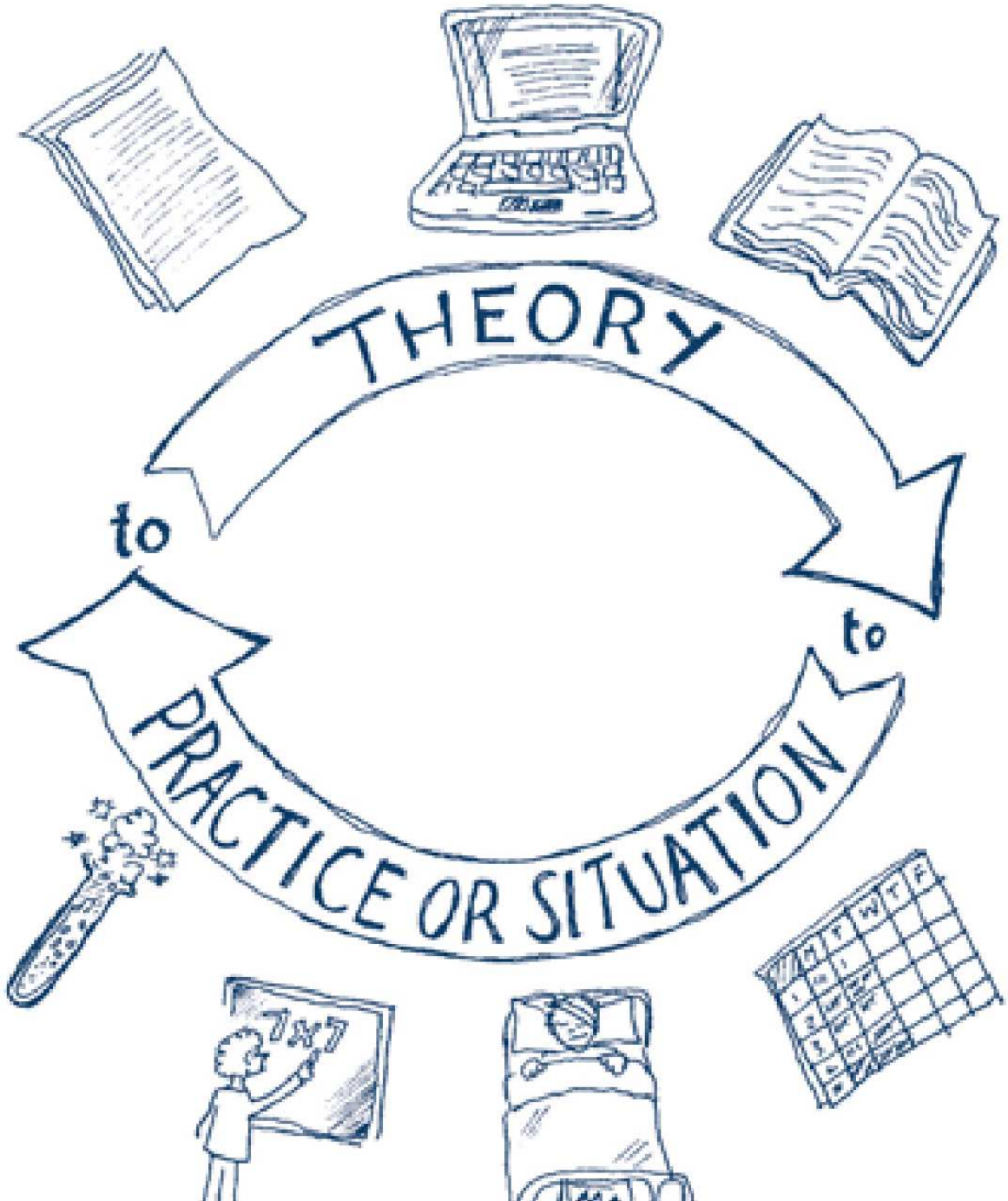
- Bring together different sources to serve an argument or idea you are constructing.
- Make logical connections between the different sources that help you shape and support your ideas
- In making ‘logical connections’ between different sources, point out **differences**, **reservations** and **agreement** between your sources

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Evaluate

- ...assess the worth of an idea in terms of its relevance to your needs, the evidence on which it is based and how it relates to other pertinent ideas
- You've thought about the **relationship** between ideas and interpretations; now you look more carefully at each one to consider its merits, its strengths and weaknesses, the **evidence** or **argument** on which it is based

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Apply

- ...transfer the understanding you have gained from your critical evaluation and use in response to questions, assignments and projects

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Justify

- Use critical thinking to develop arguments, draw conclusions, make inferences and identify implications
- You are able to argue, defend, justify
- You may end with the:
  - So what? What if? What next? Questions – the implications

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Critical Thinking: A Quick Overview

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What is Critical Thinking?

"...cognitive skills and intellectual dispositions needed to effectively identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments and truth claims; to discover and overcome personal preconceptions and biases; to formulate and present convincing reasons in support of conclusions; and to make reasonable, intelligent decisions about what to believe and what to do."

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Critical thinking is about...

- Asking questions
- Being thoughtful
- Diging deeper
- Understanding different approaches
- Balancing up one thing against another

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Critical Thinking: Benefits

- Improve your ability to understand arguments and issues discussed in textbooks and classes
- Critically evaluate what you learn in class
- Learn how to formulate your own arguments
- Avoid making foolish personal decisions through careful, clear and logical thinking
- Success at work

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Critical Thinking: Barriers

- Lack of relevant background information
- Poor reading skills
- Bias
- Prejudice
- Superstitution
- Egocentrism
- Sociocentrism
- Peer pressure
- Conformism
- Narrow and closed mindedness
- Distrust in science
- Tunnel vision
- Unwarranted assumptions
- Overpowering emotions
- Self-deception
- Wishful thinking
- Confirmation bias
- Selective perception

Critical thinkers: characteristics

- Listen open-mindedly to opposing views and welcome criticisms of beliefs and assumptions
- Base their beliefs on facts and evidence rather than on personal preference or self-interest
- Aware of the biases and preconceptions that shape the way they perceive the world
- Think independently and are not afraid to disagree with group opinion

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Critical thinkers: characteristics cont'd

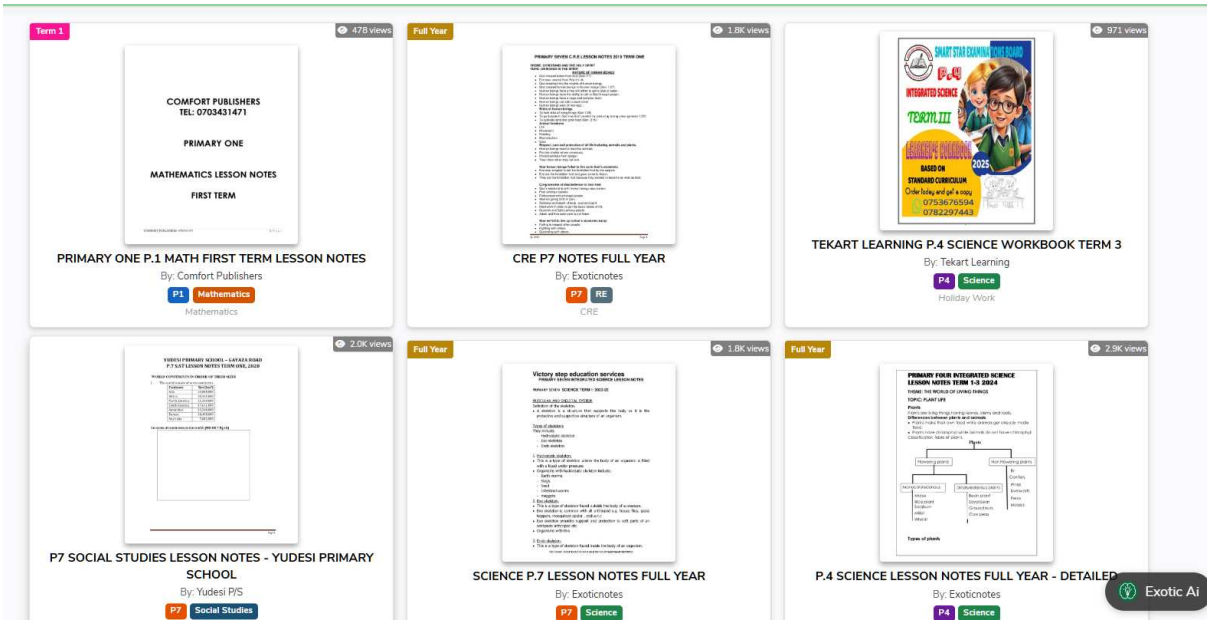
- Able to get to the heart of the problem without being distracted by details
- Have intellectual courage to face and assess fairly ideas that challenge even their most basic beliefs
- Pursue truth and are curious about a wide range of issues
- Have intellectual perseverance to pursue insights or truths despite obstacles or difficulties

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END

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