

Critical Thinking

SUU Writing Center

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Critical thinking is perhaps the most challenging part of writing well. When evaluating your essay's level of critical thinking, you should **consider the originality, development, and clarity of your ideas**. On the college level, it is virtually impossible to receive a passing grade if you present a simple summary regarding, say, a novel your class has read and must now write about. Your goal is instead to come to a conclusion about the significance of what the details in the book might mean based on evidence found in it and in your research. You will most likely be evaluated on how well you assert and support your point with evidence.

1) Prewriting	Questions to ask yourself
Before writing your paper, think about the issue you want to address. Be sure that the paper carries a strong point and purpose, particularly one that your reader will easily understand, as well.	What is the purpose of my paper? What is the argument of my paper? What do I have to say? What do I want to say? What is the problem that is posed? What question or issue am I trying to address?
Now that you have a topic and an issue, consider your available resources. In addition to your own thinking, there are several articles and other sources of information to help you analyze your ideas. If you are writing about a novel, consider the specific examples of characters and events that help to illustrate your point. Above all, avoid mere summary . Readers should be able to follow your argument, but not be supplied with the novel's entire plot or an articles complete argument. Rather than only summarizing, take the text or issues to a deeper level to reveal hidden or deeper meanings, interpretations, or insights.	What is my point of view? What is the point of view illustrated in my outside resources? What are some of my ideas that reach beyond the actual plot of the story or issue? What is the purpose of my writing about this issue? Why is it important? What do I want my reader to get out of reading this paper?

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2) Writing

Choose specific examples/quotes/research from the text or your sources to support your already existing argument. DO NOT let these supplementary thoughts speak for themselves; always incorporate your own thinking and conclusion to stand as the main argument behind your writing.	Why is this statement important? What is it saying about my subject matter? Why did I include it in my paper? And most important of all: How does it support my argument?
NEVER assume that your cleverly chosen examples/sources will speak for themselves or clearly connect back to your thesis statement. ALL examples need your introduction and follow-up commentary. As a general rule, your analysis following a quote or an example should be at least as long as the quote itself.	What does this example specifically reveal about my issue or topic from the story? How is this example/source significant to the topic of my paper? Can I expound upon it or explain its significance in more depth? Do ALL my sources have well-developed commentary? Do I introduce ALL my sources so my reader will know where they come from and/or how they connect to my ideas in the paper?
Before finishing your rough draft, check the viewpoint of your argument. You may have included evidence for it, but including counterarguments can make your line of reasoning even stronger. Make sure you acknowledge the opposing sides of your argument and then identify their weaknesses to further support your point.	How are my assumptions shaping my point of view? Should I remedy or better justify those assumptions? Have I researched and considered other points of view and identified their strengths and weaknesses?

3) Editing/Analysis

If time permits, leave your paper for at least a day, and come back to it as if it were something you had never read. Critique its continuity and focus, making sure that everything makes sense and nothing leaves your readers asking questions.	Are all my research elements incorporated together to prove one general idea? Does that idea weave throughout my essay or are there areas where I have deviated from it? Are there any areas where my reader might be confused about what I am saying?
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One final way to check that the critical thinking in your essay is original, well-developed, and clear is to read the essay out loud to yourself and/or to have someone else read it with you. Visiting the SUU Writing Center with your paper in hand is one excellent way to do this! ☺