Overview

Critical:

• Thinking
• Reading
• Writing
What is critical thinking?: definitions suggested by Aust. academics

- David: CT is a mixture of attitudes and skills
- Patsy: CT is really self-reflective thinking
- Lee: to me, being critical is always questioning
- Janet: CT implies that you don’t take things at face value, that you look underneath the information to see where it comes from, who’s said it, what it purports to be but what it might be really about.
What’s an opinion?

- An opinion (or common belief) has a degree of subjectivity
- Unlike certain knowledge, e.g. $1+1=2$ or there are no square circles,

- Different kinds of “opinion”
  - tastes or preferences, e.g. strawberry ice cream is better than chocolate.
  - views about questions such as ethics or politics
  - views based on technical expertise, such as legal or scientific opinions.

(adapted from P. Stokes, 2012)
Assertion and Argument

Assertion
  Springsteen is a brilliant guitarist

• Argument
  Springsteen is a brilliant guitarist because he plays very fast and my friend who plays in a band says so and he’s a great guitarist.

• An argument is a logically reasoned statement supported by evidence
Argument or assertion?

• Abortion is wrong.

• If Mike Baird is Premier of NSW then he is a member of parliament.
Argument

• What you are claiming:
  Mike Baird is an MP in NSW.

• What your reasons are:
  To be Premier you have to be a member of parliament.
  Mike Baird is Premier of NSW.
Argument

- **Everyday argument:** A disagreement between two or more people

- **Academic argument:** a logically reasoned statement supported by evidence.

- **To make an academic argument:**
  put forward a point of view (also called a thesis, a position or a claim) and
  try to convince others that your point is valid or logical through reasons (or premises), or evidence, to support or justify your point.

- Almost all claims or thesis statements are arguable. While facts can be verified their interpretation can still be challenged.
What does “everyone’s entitled to their opinion “ mean?

- No-one has the right to stop people thinking and saying whatever they want – true, regardless of whether the claim has been disproven many time.

- Entitled to have your views treated as serious candidates for the truth – false

(adapted from P. Stokes, 2012)
entitled to an opinion 2

• Don’t confuse:

Not having your views taken seriously

With

Not being allowed to hold or express those views at all
Reading critically: important starting points

• Recognising the writer’s purpose
• Recognising patterns of argument
• Linking the ideas in the text to other ideas and texts
• Exploring alternative ideas to the stated idea
• Recognising the writer’s/ your assumptions and underlying values
A critical approach to reading

• What is your purpose in reading this text?

• What question am I asking of it?
Reading critically 1

First, look for the following:

• What kind of text is it? A book, a government report, a research article, a newspaper article?

• Who wrote it? What are their qualifications in this area? Who published it? When? Is the publisher a reputable one in your area?
Reading critically 2

Then:

• Look at the table of contents
• Look at the blurb on the back
• Skim through the book, looking at the introduction
• Read the summary (or abstract) of an article
Reading critically 3

- Look at the organization of the book or article.
- Scan for particular topics that are relevant for your assignment.
- Look for keywords in the index of a book.
- Read the main introduction
- Decide if you need to read all of it or just a few chapters.
Reading critically 4

• Read more slowly and carefully.
• Notice where the writer states their aim or purpose, or their argument etc.
• Mark these points with a symbol (asterisk, circle etc)
• Read again and note significant points (see form).
This chapter provides an overview of the social development approach. It outlines the key features, traces its history, and discusses the main strategies that are used in social development. Finally, it examines some of the issues and controversies arising out of the implementation of the social development approach.

(Midgley, 1997, p.181)
Reading critically 5

• Catch hold of your first spontaneous response to a point.
• Does it make sense in terms of your experience and observations?
• Do you find the argument convincing?
• Don’t censor yourself – if you think something is rubbish, then work out why.
• Follow up this intuition by looking for other writings expressing a similar point view.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes from the text you have read (+ bibliographic details &amp; page numbers)</th>
<th>Compare with similar points made by other authors</th>
<th>Your response: evaluation etc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| This section records the paraphrases of or quotations from the text you have read | Here you include the interpretation of the reading **(SO WHAT)**  
- does this text mean?  
- what is its significance?  
- why is it important?  
How does it relate to other texts?  
- how does it fit with what I already know?) | |
Critical synopsis of a text

• What was the researcher’s aim?
• What are the researcher’s main arguments or findings?
• What is the writer’s theoretical framework?
• What assumptions is s/he making?
• Is the argument logical?
• What evidence is presented to support the arguments?
• What are the study’s strengths and limitations?
Theory or theoretical framework
(often used interchangeably)

- **theory** can be defined as a “system of ideas or statements” that provide a coherent way of investigating or explaining something (OED).

- **theoretical framework** has the sense of a structure, perhaps one built of more than one theory. It focuses on particular aspects of a phenomenon and thus it influences what we see. This can be compared to a framed or unframed view.
Evaluating evidence

• Where does the evidence come from?
• Is it accurate and undistorted?
• Is it relevant?
• Is it current?
• Is it sufficient?
• What conclusions are drawn from the evidence?
• Are these conclusions justified?

(adapted from Fowler and Aron, 1998)
Texts

• Read texts a, b, and c.

• Identify the type (or mode) of writing used in each one.
Modes of writing

- Narrative
- Description
- Explanation or analysis
- Argument or critique
Different modes of writing (1)

- Narration: telling the story. Give an account of events, people or ideas as they occur over time.
- Description: give details of the characteristics of a person, event, object or place.
Different modes of writing (2)

• Explanation: an analysis of a person, event or process, giving the reasons for or why it happened.

• Argument or critique: a judgment or evaluation of an event, person or action etc.
“Just description”

• **Janet** The most common thing I would be writing [on student assignments] is ‘this is just description’, reflecting the fact that the person has not thought critically about what they’ve discovered. For example, writing about a particular country that was under reconstruction and really the description of it was almost like a sales ad for what the UN and others were doing there.
Critical writing 1

• Asking questions is crucial here too. In developing an argument for an essay you:
  – Ask questions about the topic, and about various authors’ views on it
  – look for areas of agreement and disagreement.
  – ask questions about the reasons for the positions that different authors take, about the evidence they put forward, and about their underlying assumptions.
Critical writing 2

• develop your own ideas, and have new insights about the topic.

• synthesize these and other authors’ ideas

• put forward your own argument about the topic, elaborate it point by point, select evidence for those points, and explore its implications.
Modality

• Modality indicates whether a speaker thinks that a statement is:
  • Certain, probable or possible, or
  • Advisable or obligatory

• Modality is expressed by:
  • modal verbs such as *may, might, should, could* etc
  • verbs such as *suggests, indicates, tends*
  • words such as *possibly, probably, likely.*
# Making claims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaker</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Stronger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Might result in</td>
<td>may result in</td>
<td>will result in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is possible that</td>
<td>it is very likely that</td>
<td>it is certain that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would seem to have</td>
<td>seems to have</td>
<td>has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May have/ contributed to</td>
<td>indicates</td>
<td>caused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggests</td>
<td>indicates</td>
<td>shows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Paltridge & Starfield, 2007)
Writer’s voice and topic sentence

• States the main point

• Develops the argument. Topic sentences make your argument clear throughout the essay, point by point.

• Is in the writer’s voice; (don’t include a quotation or begin with reference to another author).

• Is usually the first sentence
Stating an argument

Q: “Innocence is determined by how you interpret the evidence.” Discuss by referring specifically to the Linda Chamberlain case.

In 1982 Lindy Chamberlain was convicted of murdering her baby, Azaria, while camping at Uluru (Ayers Rock). This essay argues that to a significant extent Lindy Chamberlain was convicted of Azaria’s death because of the interpretation of evidence. This essay will examine the controversy surrounding three pieces of evidence: the ‘blood’ found in the car; the presence of a dingo; and the holes in the baby’s jumpsuit.

(Fitzsimmons, TLC, UNSW, 2009)
Reporting other people’s writing

Consider how much prominence you want to give to your sources.

• **Idea prominent:** The concept of poverty has been the focus of intensive research in many countries (Ravaillon, 1996).

• **Author prominent:** Ravaillon (1996) notes that the concept of poverty has been the focus of intensive research in many countries. (adapted from Saunders, 2003).
When you quote

• Make the point first in your own words & then use the quotation to:
  – Give it more authority
  – Express it in a particularly eloquent way
  – Let someone else’s voice be heard

• Explain the significance of your quotation. For every line you should have a line of commentary or interpretation.

• Don’t quote because you’re too tired to construct the sentence yourself.
### Whose voice? (Ridley, 2008, p.141)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who’s responsible?</th>
<th>Textual voice</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Global warming is a serious risk to the planet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Global warming is a serious risk to the planet (Clark 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Corresponding</td>
<td>As Clark (2006) point out, global warming is a ..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>Subordinate</td>
<td>Clark (2006) points out that global warming is a ..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Delayed</td>
<td>Clark (2006) argues that global warming … According, to Clark (2006),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>global …</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Examples

- **Central**
  - Global warming is a serious risk to the planet.
- **Delayed**
  - According to Clark (2006), global …
- **Subordinate**
  - Clark (2006) points out that global warming is a ..
- **Author**
  - Clark (2006) argues that global warming …
Reporting a writer’s words

• Check that the reporting word is appropriate to the context, and accurately reflects the writer’s meaning.
• Generally, the present tense is used, e.g. argues, comments, describes.
• However, if you are referring to what someone actually did in the past you use the simple past tense, e.g. surveyed, interviewed, found (on the basis of research).
Reporting a writer’s words or actions accurately and appropriately

• Various verbs are used to report what a writer has said or done. You can indicate that the writer is:
  – making a statement (says, comments, states)
  – arguing a position (argues, claims)
  – has a positive attitude (supports, agrees), or
  – a negative attitude (criticizes, dismisses) towards their subject or
  – how sure the writer is (questions, suggests, insists).
Reporting verbs and phrases

- **Neutral expressions**: describe, show, discuss, report
- **Verbs that indicate author’s thinking**: propose, hypothesise, predict, conclude
- **Verbs that indicate what author did**: develop, examine, investigate, find, observe, study, analyse, use

Check whether the verb is followed by *that* or by a noun

http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/quot.html
• For PPT slides:

gettingstarted.unsw.edu.au/orientation
References

What does the LC do?

• Provides academic support services to all UNSW students
• Offers learning and language assistance programs
What kind of assistance is available at the LC?

- Workshops in academic skills
- Individual consultations
- Faculty or discipline-based programs
- Academic skills resources online
- Self-access resources at the LC
The Learning Centre offers free academic skills support to all students enrolled at The University of New South Wales. We assist students adjusting to academic culture and to new approaches to learning and teaching.

**Learning Centre Office Locations**

**For Students**
- During Session- Workshops and short courses on different academic genres, oral presentations, study/learning strategies, thesis writing, and conversation classes. Book Online
- During Session- Consultations with a peer writing assistant. Book Online

**For everyone/anyone**
- Extensive range of free online academic skills resources in various formats- static web-pages, interactive tutorials, pdf downloads. Developed by Learning Centre and Faculty staff for UNSW students. [http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/olib.html](http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/olib.html)
- Follow us on..  
  ![Social Media Icons]