How do I think, read and write critically?

Question what you read, looking for bias and flaws in the reasoning.

Cath Senker
Author, editor, teacher
Critical thinking skills

Model to Generate Critical Thinking

Description
- What?
- When?
- Who?

Analysis
- Why?
- Where?
- How?

Evaluation
- What if?
- So What?
- What next?

Topic / Issue / Title

John Hilsdon, Learning Development Advisor, University of Plymouth
Think outside the box

* Do not believe everything you hear or read!
* Critical questions:
  - Why?
  - How much/often/far?
  - To what extent?
  - For what reason?
  - Which is preferable?

How to think & read critically

- Think independently
- Evaluate your source before and during reading
- Question what you read
- Examine your reading in detail and from different angles
- Look for possible flaws in the reasoning, the evidence or the way the conclusion is drawn
- Check for hidden assumptions
- Compare the article to other published materials
- Check for bias

Critically evaluate the source

- Who is the author?
- What is their main line of reasoning?
- What might be the interests of the author?
Evaluate the evidence

Check that sources are given for all evidence presented

Check the date of the research (current versus out-dated)

Check for bias (one-sided, too persuasive, vested interest)

Check for relevance

Check for validity and significance

Check representativeness (sample size)

Look out for persuader words (e.g. ‘clearly’, ‘obviously’)

I revised really well for that exam but I got a low mark. Therefore, next time I won’t revise and I should get a better mark.

A recent survey reveals that most people prefer oranges to apples.

The woollen jacket caused a serious skin reaction in a three-year old child. Thus the sale of woollen clothing should be banned.

(Adapted from Cottrell, 2003, p. 225)
Critical writing strategy

Compare and contrast your readings and summarise similarities and differences in your writing

1. Introduce a concept / framework / theory
2. Describe it briefly
3. Show how different authors interpret it
4. Draw conclusions
Phrases for critical writing

* Similarities
  “Smith (2009) and Bromely (2011) state that.... Similarly, Hutchinson (2012) points out that.... This is supported by....”

* Differences:
  “Marley (2012) suggests that ..... However, Hartman (2013) opposes this by stating that... “ “Henderson (2013) argues that...In contrast... Hartman (2013) found that...”

* Additional viewpoints
  “An additional point of view is suggested by...”
More phrases for critical writing

- **Similar:** Moreover, furthermore, likewise, besides, further, equally, similarly
- **Contrast:** In comparison, on the other hand, on the contrary, nevertheless, conversely, the antithesis, yet, nonetheless, in contrast, notwithstanding, however
- **Additional viewpoint:** Another, of equal importance, in addition to, secondly

http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/Transitions.html
How to conclude critical analytical writing

- Evaluate strengths and weaknesses
  “Overall, the strengths seem to outweigh the weaknesses given that...”

- Identify significance
  “This research is significant as it shows that...”

- Link examples and evidence to your argument
  “The above examples suggest that...Therefore one can argue that (draw conclusion)”

- Make reasoned judgements
  “The above evidence supports ... because...”