

Criteria for good essays—use this checklist for your own writing assignments!

(adapted from Cottrell, *Critical Thinking Skills*, p. 192)

Criteria	No - To Do	To Some Extent	Yes!	Comments
1. The essay contains a clearly written introduction in the first paragraph				
2. The key issues and relevant background are explained				
3. Position/Conclusion is clearly stated				
4. The reasons / premises <i>for</i> the position are clearly stated and explained				
5. Reasons / premises <i>for</i> the position are clearly linked to each other and presented in a logical order				
6. Assumptions are identified and are not contentious				
7. Reasons / arguments <i>against</i> the position are clearly stated and explained				
8. There is a reasoned evaluation and charitable analysis of counterarguments / evidence <i>against</i> the position				
9. Reasons / arguments <i>for and against</i> the position are weighed against each other to form a balanced conclusion				
10. The essay contains a clearly written conclusion in the last paragraph				
11. The conclusion is clearly linked to the evidence / arguments for and against discussed throughout the essay, including the synthesis				
12. The student makes good use of sources (including background and evidence for and against the conclusion)				
13. The essay does not contain any non-essential, descriptive background, unnecessary redundancies, or inconsistencies				
14. The student's own beliefs or interests don't unfairly distort the argument, and the defence of the student's position is reason- and evidence-based rather than emotive				

15. The essay is written in clear and simple language and does not contain typographical or grammatical errors				
16. Signposting is used effectively				
17. Key terms are defined				
18. The student provides references in the text when introducing other people's ideas				
19. The student provides a list of references at the end of the essay (including the assigned readings and any additional sources cited)				
20. References are cleanly and consistently formatted				