



### **Terms**

- A critical analysis/critical literary analysis is subjective writing that expresses the writer's opinion or evaluation of a text
- Analysis means to break down and study the parts
- Writing a **critical** review requires two steps: **critical** reading and **critical** writing

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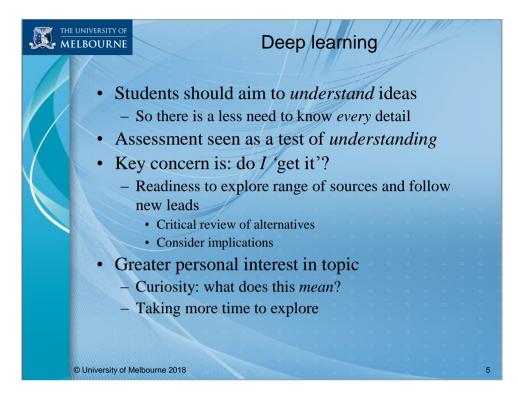
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### Masters Level Academic Views

- Critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation
  - Being critical requires you to question the information and opinions in a text and present your evaluation or judgement of the text
- Using high quality information to show in depth knowledge and understanding
- Examining issues in depth
- Constructing an argument or discussion
- Balanced, thorough judgments and conclusions
- Clear, concise writing
- Justifying a particular viewpoint or conclusion as a result of 'weighing up' the evidence
- As Masters students you are expected to be able to critically evaluate and analyse a report or document

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## Surface Learning

- Students aim to recall basic facts/information by repetition
  - Seen as a test of *memory*
- Key concern: meeting requirements
- Heavy dependence on basic books, lecture notes, handouts
  - Uncritical reproduction
  - Broad generalisations
- Often a general lack of interest in topic
  - More interest in finishing
  - Getting the job done quickly'
  - Key objective: passing subject

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# What does critically evaluating and analysing the literature mean?

- Asking the 'whys' and 'hows', not the 'whats'
- This means being analytical, not just descriptive
- Literary analysis is a careful examination and evaluation of a text, image, or other work or report

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### Literary analysis: Critical Reading

- Critical reading is an important precursor to critical writing
- The most characteristic features of critical reading are that you will:
  - Examine the evidence or arguments presented
  - Check out any influences on the evidence or arguments
  - Check out the limitations of study design or focus
  - Examine the interpretations made
  - Decide to what extent you are prepared to accept the authors' arguments, opinions, or conclusions

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## Literary analysis: Critical Reading Stages

- First Stage
  - Understand what you read
  - Identify key points
  - Summarise points
- Second Stage
  - Analyse the information to discover key themes and arguments in the report
  - Analyse evidence against processes
  - Evaluate the report and evidence
    - Themes, conditions, deeper issues

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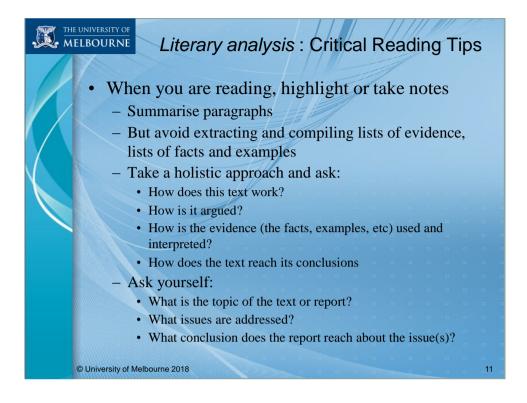


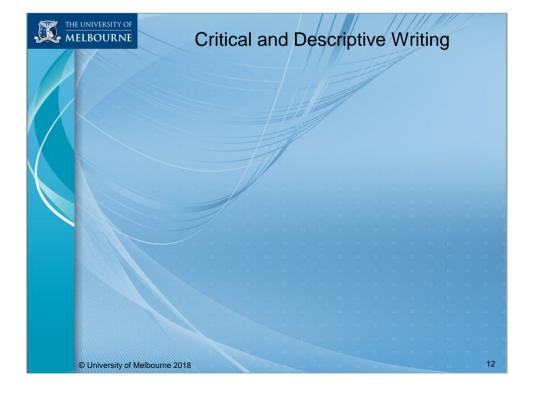
# Literary analysis : Critical Reading Stages cont

- Third Stage
  - Synthesise/create your argument and position and ultimately your assignment based on what you have read
  - Provide Findings and Concluding actions

| Summary: Stages in Critical Reading |   |  |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| First Stage                         | Understanding what you read   | Identifying key points   | Summarising points  |
| Second Stage                        | Analysing the information to discover key themes and arguments in the literature  | Comparing and contrasting what various authors believe about a topic | Evaluating the research and thinking of the authors you have read |
| Third Stage                         | Synthesising (making or creating) something new (your argument and position and ultimately your assignment) based on what you have read |  |   |

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## **Descriptive Writing**

- **Descriptive** writing sets the background
  - Represents the situation as it stands
  - Does not analyse or challenge
  - Gives a summary of a piece of literature
  - Tells the reader what you've done
  - Tends to use lots of quotes
  - Makes lists of things (literature, theories...)
  - Gives the 'facts': measurements, data, etc
  - Sets out the history of an event, idea, etc
  - Gives a biography of important people
  - Summarises what is known about the topic
  - Attractive because it is relatively simple

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## **Critical Writing**

- In contrast to the descriptive writing style used in school-based study, university study demands 'Critical' or 'Analytical' writing; sometimes referred to as 'critical analysis'
  - University study is principally concerned with what is **not** known and **not** agreed on i.e. why something happened, why is it important, what should now be done and why should it be done
  - Often has a principal argument, set out in the introduction, which runs throughout an essay or report – and why it is significant
- **Critical** writing *transforms* the information
  - Not reporting but constructing an argument
  - Pushing the ideas forward
  - Has a 'line' a thread of ideas from start to finish
- Assignments need a good balance between description (scene-setting) and analysis

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## **Critical Writing**

- Gives a clear and confident account which *refuses* simply to accept what has been said
- Gives a balanced account of pros & cons of ideas
- Avoids unsubstantiated assertions
  - Asserts or assume something is simply true
- Uses paragraphs to develop and expand ideas
- ALWAYS gives a clear and precise account of the relevant evidence and arguments
- ALWAYS backs up argument with evidence
- · ALWAYS gives reasons for conclusion
- ALWAYS recognises limitations (tends, suggests..)
- ALWAYS avoid simplistic conclusions

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## Critical Writing in Assignments

- Clearly, good critical writing also depends upon good critical reading skills
- Evaluation of the evidence is exactly the kind of thing your lecturer or tutor will be looking for as part of your critical analysis
- Most common objection: reports are 'descriptive and not analytical'

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## Critical Writing in Assignments

- 1. Identify the focus of the assignment
  - You need to be clear about your focus
- 2. Identify your own point of view
  - Sum up main argument clearly and simply
  - Decide which theory or point of view
- 3. Consider how you'll persuade other people of your point of view
  - An assignment based on good critical analysis is to identify convincing reasons to support your conclusion
  - Work out the reasons for what you are writing
- 4. Find the proof
  - A good argument is based on solid evidence
  - Identify and evaluate the available evidence to see if it really does support your point of view

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### Critical Writing in Assignments

### 5. Engage in debate

- Engage in debate with different points of view
- Academic debates aren't usually clear-cut about right or wrong
- As a student, you need to weigh up the evidence and then make a decision about which seems the most convincing

#### 6. Structure your argument

- You need to present your reasoning and evidence in a clear, well structured manner
  - Thought needs to be given how to present material in a way that helps the reader to see the point and to follow the argument
- You need to think through your argument from the point of view of your reader
  - Is each point clearly linked to the one that came before?
- Does everything you are saying build towards your final conclusion?

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|---|---|--|
|   | Descriptive                               | Critically Analytic  |
| / | States what happened                      | Identifies the significance                                |
|   | States what something is like             | Evaluates strengths and weaknesses                         |
|   | Gives the story so far                    | Weighs one piece of information against another            |
|   | States the order in which things happened | Makes reasoned judgments                                   |
|   | Says how to do something                  | Argues a case according to the evidence                    |
|   | Explains what a theory says               | Shows why something is relevant or suitable                |
|   | Explains how something works              | Indicates why something will work best                     |
|   | Notes the methods used                    | Identifies whether something is appropriate or suitable    |
|   | Says when something occurred              | Weighs up the importance of the component parts            |
|   | States the different components           | Evaluates the relative significance of details             |
|   | States options                            | Structures information in order of importance              |
|   | Lists details                             | Shows the relevance of links between pieces of information |
|   | Lists in any order                        | Draws conclusions  |
|   | States links between items                | Identifies why the timing is of importance                 |
|   | Gives information                         | Gives the reasons for selecting each option                |

| Descriptive wri<br>when you nee       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Introduce, background                 | Organise and evaluate evidence  |
| Present facts eg, a case stu          | dy Make comparisons between materials   |
| Describe how an experimen carried out | was Analyse why something did not work  |
| List details eg, resources us         | ed Apply your own judgements  |
| Outline areas of knowledge            | Make links between areas of knowledge   |
| Quote from writers in the field       | d Weigh up alternatives   |
| Provide information or data           | Evaluate/argue/contest  |
| Summarise                             | Draw conclusions  |
|                                       | ritical writing for Postgraduate Students. University of 2018, http://www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/asc |



## Critical Writing: Introductions & Conclusions

- There is often confusion about what introductions and conclusion should contain
- A good Introduction contain three things:
  - A What, Why and How
- What: i.e. what is your focus ('This report will focus on....) and what is your principal argument ('It will argue that....)
- Why: i.e. the significance and importance of the thing that you are discussing eg: why is it important for patient care or methods of teaching
- **How:** what is the structure in brief; eg: 'First the report will discuss...then it will examine...'etc
- Usually descriptive

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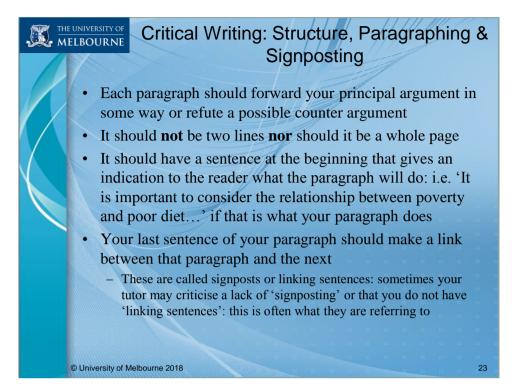
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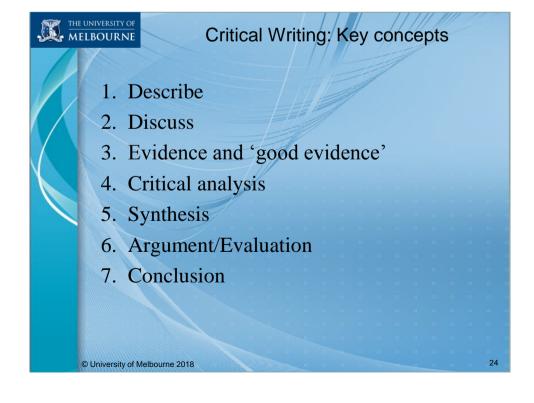


## Critical Writing: Introductions & Conclusions

- Conclusions should to a certain extent replicate the introduction's **What** and **Why**, rewritten into the past tense: in other words 'This report has argued that....' etc
- It should not contain any new information and just restate the principal argument and its significance
- Clarity within introductions and conclusions is also important and may need several drafts to get right
- You need to make sure that you have evidence that supports your conclusion
- There should always be a logical conclusion

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## Critical Writing: Key concepts cont

### 1. Describe

 Introduction, Background, assignment goals – keep to a minimum

### 2. Discuss

- Articulation of different points of view
  - · But not enough on its own

### 3. Evidence and 'good evidence'

- Evidence is what is advanced to support a claim
- Good Evidence is relevant, verifiable, representative, cumulative, actionable

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### Critical Writing: Key concepts cont

## 4. Critical analysis

- Examination of elements:
  - Analysis is sometimes seen as 'taking things apart' 'breaking them down' or 'deconstructing' them
  - **Descriptive writing** answers the *who, what, where*, and *how* questions and often tends to summarise the text
  - Analytical writing answers to the why question
  - Students consider the question: "Why is this point important?"

### 5. Synthesis

- Drawing conclusions about whether analysis conclusions put forward are valid, evidence based and justifiable
- Present your point of view in a clear, well reasoned way with justification
- Synthesis reconstructs things puts things together to reach a conclusion and make a clearer picture

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## Critical Writing: Key concepts cont

### 6. Argument/Evaluation

- Characteristics:
  - Position: Author has a position that they want the audience to accept
  - Reasons are given to support (justify) the position
  - Line of reasoning: Is the logical 'unpacking' of the reasons why 'on balance', considering everything, this argument (viewpoint) is justifiable
- 7. Conclusion: Not just a summary of the report
  - You will often have several smaller arguments/conclusions, leading to one overall conclusion

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