

CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING: EVALUATION

Sometimes referred to as a 'hierarchy of skills'...

Knowledge (recall)
Comprehension
Application
Analysis
Synthesis
Evaluation

While the idea of a 'hierarchy' should be treated with some caution, it is useful in drawing attention to the idea that skills cannot be considered in isolation: for example, sound application and analysis is likely to form a secure basis for synthesis and evaluation.

Evaluation involves making critiques or judgements and supporting those judgements with reference to evidence, data and logical arguments, which will come from primary and secondary sources. These sources will need to be cited.

For assessment purposes, you need to demonstrate evaluative skills to examiners. The list below indicates some of the ways in which you can do this.

- Answers should include alternative points of view and these should be clearly identified.
- Some attempt should be made to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the different viewpoints.
- Where possible, you should use evidence data to provide support for arguments or to refute a point of view.
- Evidence should be CITED from both textual and, where appropriate, non-textual/ statistical sources.
- Literature reviews and APA referencing are crucially important.
- When commenting on matters relating to conflicting policy objectives, you might wish to consider the reliability of sources. For example: is the source reliable, subject to possible bias, inaccurate in any respect, out-of-date or incomplete? Does a source provide a distinctive body of evidence of its own, and/ or a distinctive logical argument, or does it merely 'churn' and regurgitate opinions of other writers?
- You might identify the circumstances where different outcomes are likely.

- Consider making a list of pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages, arguments for and arguments against. The 'brainstorming' of such lists is low-level evaluation. It becomes more sophisticated when we prioritise the items in the list, to distinguish the more important from the less important, and when we assess the balance of arguments, stating which side of the argument we consider to be the stronger, and providing a justification. Also consider making a recommendation or series of recommendations, again with a justification for them.
- You might also discuss how conclusions might be affected by variable influences and different factors.
- It is often important to show that you can distinguish between short term and long term effects.
- When demonstrating the ability to evaluate, it is essential to include a conclusion. A conclusion might be used, for example, to summarise the previous discussion, synthesise arguments and make final judgements. While you may wish to show support for a particular point of view, it is acceptable to conclude that there is insufficient evidence to support a particular opinion. Final judgements might be qualified by statements that include phrases such as 'it depends on'.

Glossary of useful words and phrases

The following list is not meant to be exhaustive but it does provide examples of 'words and phrases' that you might find helpful to get started in making judgements.

However

Hence

Nevertheless

Although

It is likely that

The tendency is

But

In retrospect

On the other hand

In the short term..... but in the long term

It depends what is meant by

It depends upon

The data suggest that

According to the article

The writer argues that but

Writer X argues that.... however writer Y takes an alternative view

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