4.8: Critical Writing

What it is?

Have you ever been asked to write in a critical manner?

Critical writing involves critical thinking. This type of thinking develops over the course of your university program and involves learning to evaluate and reconstruct your thinking and ideas in the context of other peoples’ thinking and ideas. You may be involved in critical thinking and writing related to phenomena such as journal articles, healthcare issues, new clinical guidelines, and healthcare policy issues. See Table 4.2.

Overall, you should use critical thinking and writing when you start breaking down your topic to develop discussion points. You will also use critical analysis when you synthesize, or blend, your ideas with those of experts. This means you will go beyond a statement of facts and take a stance, stating your view on an idea or issue and on core sources of information on that topic: you will insert your own ideas into the text’s conversation.

Table 4.2: Critical thinking and critical writing

| Critical thinking may involve: | Critical writing may involve: |
• Being curious and reflecting carefully on a topic.
• Having an inquiring mind by being skeptical and examining your own thinking and the thinking of others concerning a topic. Don’t just accept an argument or a way of thinking. Ask why. For example, why do I believe that access to healthcare should be a human right? Why do the authors of Article X propose a two-tier healthcare system? What evidence supports or does not support this case?
• Being open to making logical and reasoned judgments and conclusions based on this thinking.
• Responding to a text and determining its quality and relevance to your clinical practice.
• Evaluating a specific phenomenon or issue. You may be asked to challenge the status quo and question pervasive ideology underpinned by social justice. For example, you may be asked to question immigration policies that limit healthcare for newcomers, or to challenge gendered practices in maternal healthcare delivery, or to critically evaluate clinical guidelines related to the effectiveness of methods that verify gastric tube placement.
• Critically examining the sources you use to support your writing.

How to do it?

The steps involved in critical writing depend on the context of your writing and what you are asked to write about. Here are some general steps:

1. Demonstrate concise and comprehensive understanding of your issue. You should contextualize the issue in relation to other work, so it will be helpful to begin with some pre-reading strategies and notetaking to understand the big picture. It will be difficult for your audience to think critically about your argument if you do not provide a clear picture of the issue, so gaps in your understanding will undermine your goal.

2. Critically evaluate the phenomenon or the text in question. This will involve identifying strengths and limitations. You don’t necessarily need to adopt a negative position in which you focus on deficits and limitations alone – it’s possible to focus on the positive aspects of a phenomenon or a combination of both negative and positive elements in your critical analysis.

3. Critical analysis demonstrates that you are able to synthesize and connect ideas, arrive at your own conclusions, and develop new directions for discussion. Move beyond simply taking another person’s ideas and spitting out facts: you should show that you have used sources to develop ideas of your own, and present alternative interpretations or perspectives through evaluation, debate, and critique.

4. You will be expected to evaluate texts related to research studies. In this case, you should ask questions like: Is the purpose of the research clear? Are the study methods clearly defined? Do the data support the research findings and conclusions? Are the nursing implications clearly identified?

What to keep in mind?

Keep these tips in mind when engaging in critical thinking:

•
While summarizing an issue, it is important to adopt the language used in the original source, rather than imposing words, beliefs, or assumptions.

- Clearly and concisely argue one point at a time. An outline will help keep you on track, as each paragraph should focus on a main point.
- Highlight strengths, limitations, and recommendations in a respectful way. Severe language often can make the reader question your credibility. It is also more helpful to provide constructive feedback rather than stressing the futility of an approach. See Table 4.3 for examples of ways to avoid severe language.

**Table 4.3: Severe language and better choices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severe language</th>
<th>Better choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The study methods were difficult to understand.</td>
<td>Some readers will find the study methods difficult to understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors neglected to comprehensively examine the literature.</td>
<td>This omission of the literature seems to suggest that the authors do not have a comprehensive understanding of the body of literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nursing implications were unclear.</td>
<td>It would be useful to explicate the nursing implications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authors’ conclusions were unclear and not supported.</td>
<td>The authors’ conclusions would have been more clear and better supported if they had presented the data in a table.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Activity: Check Your Understanding**

The original version of this chapter contained H5P content. You may want to remove or replace this element.

**Attribution statement**

This content is mainly our own original content. With editorial changes, some of this content was adapted from (specifically, the last bullet in the table in column two and item three under “how to do it?”): [Writing for Success 1st Canadian Edition](https://med.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Nursing/The_Scholarship_of_Writing_in_Nursing_Education_(Lapum_et_al.)/04%3A…) by Tara Horkoff is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/), except where otherwise noted. Download for free at: [https://opentextbc.ca/writingforsuccess/](https://opentextbc.ca/writingforsuccess/)