

Evaluating your writing for critical thinking

You can copy this self-evaluation tool to use for future reports and assignments.

Self-evaluation	Yes/No	Action
1. I am clear on my position on this subject and the reasons for my point of view.		Write your position down as a statement in one or two sentences. If you cannot do so, this suggests that your position isn't yet clear in your own mind. If possible, also check whether your point of view is clear to a friend or colleague who knows little about the subject.
2. My conclusion and/or recommendations are clear, based on the evidence, and written in tentative language where appropriate.		Write your conclusions first. Read these aloud; check that they make sense. Imagine someone tells you that your conclusion is wrong. What reasons would you give to defend it? Have you included all these reasons in your writing? For language: see p. 179.
3. The material included is the most relevant to the subject.		Double-check that your line of reasoning meets the task requirements, such as meeting the project brief or answering the questions set for an essay. Does it match the statement you wrote about your position?
4. All sections of the assignment or report are relevant to the exact specifications of the task.		Read through each section or paragraph in turn, checking how the information contributes to your line of reasoning, leading to your conclusion or recommendations. Check that each meets the project brief, or is necessary to answer the set question.
5. I have analysed the structure of my argument. Reasons are presented in the best order and lead clearly towards the conclusion.		If not, write the reasons out in brief and consider how each is linked to the conclusion. Check whether the argument 'hops' from one point to another. Cluster similar reasons together and indicate how each contributes to the main argument or conclusion.
6. The argument stands out clearly from other information. I have selected the best examples.		Check you have not presented so much detail that the main argument is lost. An analysis of a few examples or details is better than a superficial approach to lots of material. Select carefully to meet the task requirement.
7. My reasons are clearly linked to one another and to the conclusion(s).		Check that each paragraph opens with a clear link to what has gone before or signals a change in the direction of your argument using 'signal words' such as those suggested in Chapter 10.
8. My main reasons and key points stand out clearly to the reader.		Take a marker pen and highlight the sentence that sums up the main point or reason covered in each paragraph. If you find this difficult, it is likely that your reader will find it hard to identify your points. If large sections of a paragraph are highlighted, then it is probable that you haven't summarised its main point sufficiently.

Self evaluation	Yes/No	Action
9. My facts are accurate.		Don't rely on opinion or memory. Check that your sources are reputable and up to date. Investigate whether anything published more recently gives different information. Check that you have reported the facts accurately, and without distortion.
10. I have included reference to relevant theories.		Find out the schools of thought or theories related to this subject. Make a critical evaluation of these to identify where they support or conflict with your argument.
11. I make use of other people's research as supporting evidence to strengthen my argument.		Check what has been written or produced on this subject by other people. Include references to relevant items that best support your point of view.
12. I have cited the source of information for evidence and theories to which I refer.		Write out the details of the references in brief within the text, and in full at the end of the writing.
13. I include a reasoned evaluation of views that do not support my own argument.		Find out what has been written that contradicts your point of view, and consider any other potential objections that could be raised. Evaluate these as part of your line of reasoning. Make it clear why your reasons are more convincing than opposing points of view. Identify any flaws, gaps or inconsistencies in the counter arguments.
14. My writing is mainly analytical and contains only brief, essential descriptive writing.		Check whether all sections of descriptive writing and background information are essential to understanding your reasoning or are part of the conventions of the type of report you are writing. Keep descriptions very brief, look for ways of summarising them and link them clearly to your main argument. Beware of wordy introductions.
15. I have checked my argument for inconsistencies.		Check whether any of the reasons or evidence you have used could be interpreted as contradicting what you have written elsewhere in the piece of writing.
16. I have given clear indications of levels of probability or uncertainty.		Check that your writing indicates your judgement of how likely it is that the conclusion is accurate and irrefutable. If there is a chance that research findings could be interpreted differently by someone else, use appropriate language to indicate a level of uncertainty or ambiguity. See p. 179.
17. My current beliefs are not unfairly distorting my argument.		If any section of your assignment covers a subject where you have strong beliefs or interests, be especially careful that you have checked the evidence supports your reasoning. It is important that your arguments come across in a calm and reasoned way that will convince your reader. Check several times, and be careful not to include emotive language or poorly substantiated opinions.
18. I have covered all the required aspects of the assignment.		Check the assignment's details carefully. Tick aspects already completed so it is clear what else you must do.

Aspect	Yes/No	Comments
1. The writer's own position on the issues is clear.		
2. It is clear what the reasons are for the writer's point of view.		
3. The writer's conclusion is clear and based on the evidence.		
4. Reasons are presented in a logical order, as a line of reasoning.		
5. The argument is well structured and easy to follow.		
6. Reasons are clearly linked to one another and to the conclusion.		
7. All the text is relevant to the assignment		
8. The main reasons and key points stand out clearly to the reader.		
9. The writer makes good use of other people's research as supporting evidence to strengthen the argument.		
10. Does the writer make a reasoned evaluation of other people's views, especially those that contradict his or her own point of view?		
11. Does the writer provide references in the text when introducing other people's ideas?		
12. Does the writer provide a list of references at the end of the essay?		
13. Has the writer successfully removed any non-essential descriptive writing?		
14. Does the writing contain any inconsistencies?		
15. Are the writer's beliefs or self-interests unfairly distorting the argument?		