



Academic Writing: Writing in a critical way

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Learning Objectives

- Understand what is meant by academic writing
- Understand what is meant by critical thinking
- Awareness of academic conventions and practices
- Learn how to develop argument in your writing
- Resources



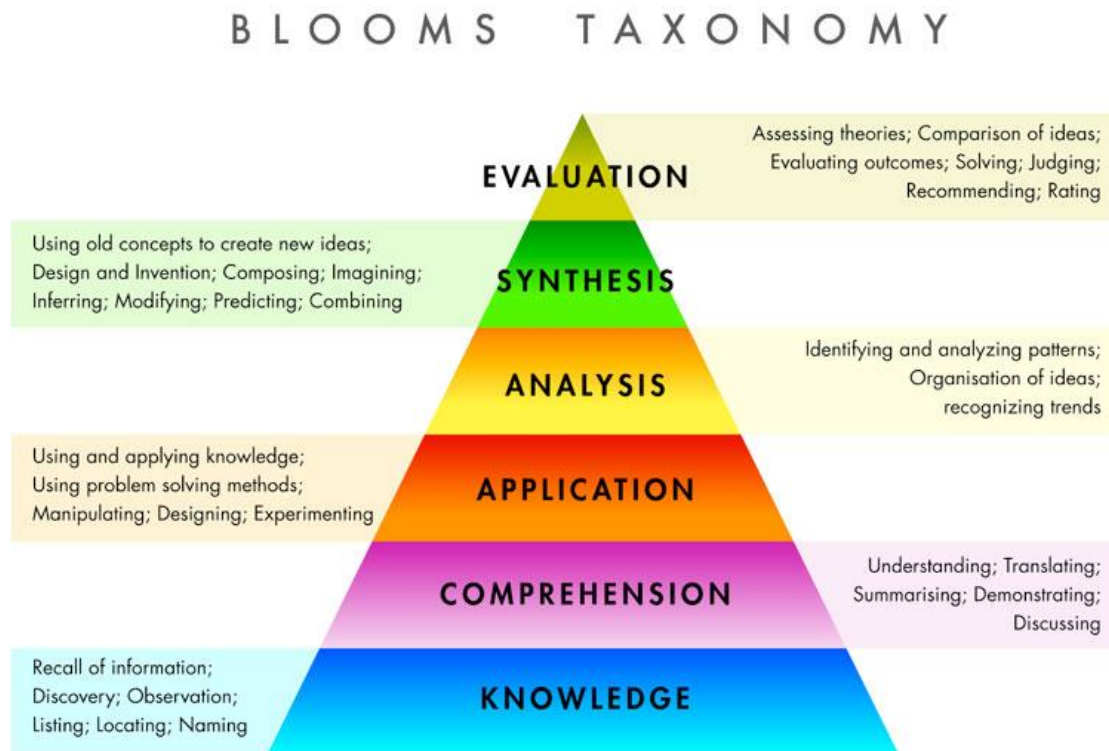
Writing in an academic way

- Being critical and analytical
- Using language in a precise & subject-specific way
- Adopting a position or claim - thesis
- Drawing on and citing a range of authors & arguments to support
- Remaining objective



Bloom's Taxonomy –Critical thinking

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aelxjO9DEtY>





Steps in constructing argument

- Analyse topic
- Write down your working title
- Your point of view in relation to topic
 - Keep thesis prominent
- What is your argument/position?



Topic

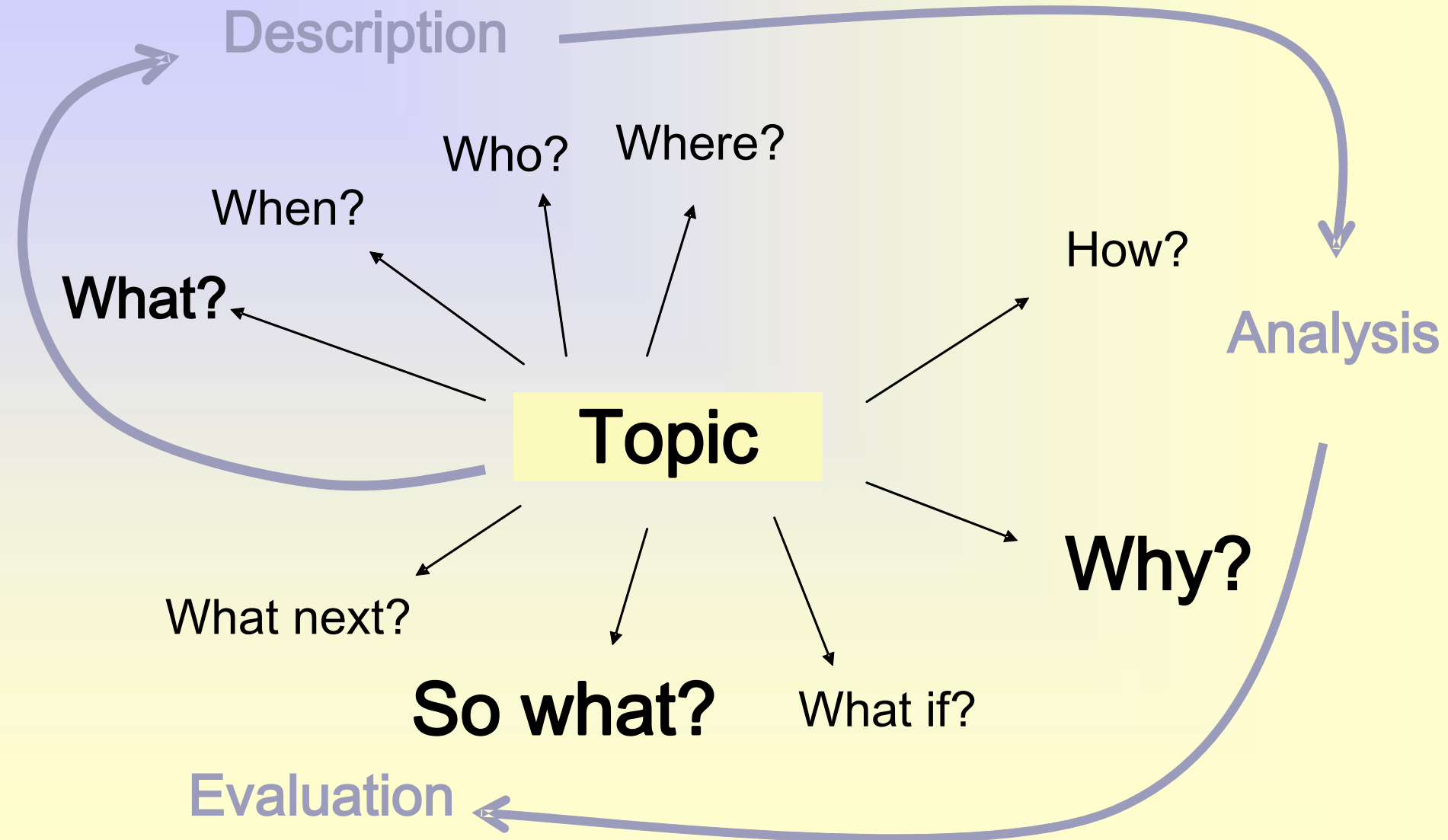
- Usually has premise invites you to take a position
- Do you agree or disagree?
- Key concepts, theories, model, practice or idea



What is critical writing?

- Argument
 - Evaluate & weigh up ideas
 - State point of view
 - Consider available evidence
 - Possible counter arguments
 - Claim that is proven throughout the paper
- Opinion
 - Point of view
 - Lack of supporting evidence
 - Personal feelings and views

Model to Generate Critical Thinking





Thesis Statement

- **PARAGRAPH 1**
The Black Death (otherwise known as the Bubonic Plague) first appeared in Europe in the 1340s. Spread by rodents and fleas, the infection is said to have 'carried off' a third of Europe's population. Plague causes fever and a painful swelling of the lymph glands called buboes. The disease also causes spots on the skin that are red at first and then turn black.
- **PARAGRAPH 2**
The Black Death of 1348 coincided with fundamental changes in the social framework of the later Middle Ages. However, the disease alone was not responsible for these changes. Rather, it is necessary to consider a number of economic, agricultural and health factors in assessing the transformation of late medieval society.

Some Examples:

“In the last 20 years, rates of divorce have risen significantly in Western countries. Critically analyse some of the different explanations given for this phenomenon. In your discussion you should consider what implications these explanations might have for social policy.”

[From www.monash.edu.au/lis/lionline/writing/general/essay/essay-topic/index.xml]

Introduction

A major change that has occurred in the Western family is an increased incidence in divorce. Whereas in the past, divorce was a relatively rare occurrence, in recent times it has become quite commonplace. This change is borne out clearly in census figures. For example thirty years ago in Australia, only one marriage in ten ended in divorce; nowadays the figure is more than one in three (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996: p.45). A consequence of this change has been a substantial increase in the number of single parent families and the attendant problems that this brings (Kilmartin, 1997).

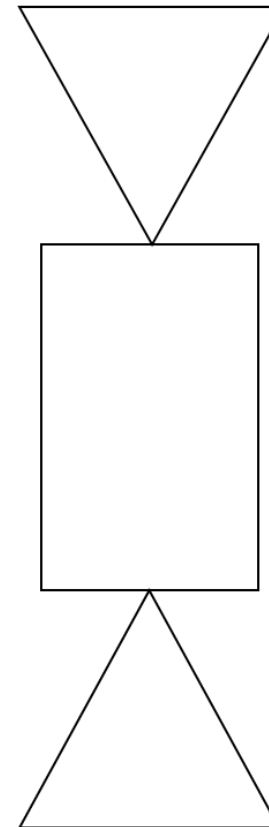
An important issue for sociologists, and indeed for all of society, is why these changes in marital patterns have occurred. In this essay I will seek to critically examine a number of sociological explanations for the 'divorce phenomenon' and also consider the social policy implications that each explanation carries with it. It will be argued that the best explanations are to be found within a broad socio-economic framework.



Organising your argument

- Title
- Introduction
 - Thesis statement
 - Background
 - Plan of essay
- Body Paragraphs
 - Constructing Topic Sentences
 - Building Main Points
 - Countering the Opposition
- Conclusion

From Purdue University Writing Lab
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>





- Points to support your thesis / theme / argument
- Series of sentences
 - Topic sentence
 - Supporting sentences
- Coherent
- Common theme – one idea or topic ONLY
- Main idea in one paragraph flows logically into the next (O'Sullivan & Cleary, 2010)

Structuring your paragraphs



One type of explanation for rising divorce has focused on changes in laws relating to marriage. [Topic sentence] For example, Bilton, Bonnett and Jones (1987) argue that increased rates of divorce do not necessarily indicate that families are now more unstable. It is possible, they claim, that there has always been a degree of marital instability. [Evidence] They suggest that changes in the law have been significant, because they have provided unhappily married couples with 'access to a legal solution to pre-existent marital problems' (p.301). Bilton et al. therefore believe that changes in divorce rates can be best explained in terms of changes in the legal system. [Further support] The problem with this type of explanation however, is that it does not consider why these laws have changed in the first place. It could be argued that reforms to family law, as well as the increased rate of divorce that has accompanied them, are the product of more fundamental changes in society. [Conclusion]



Signposting your line of reasoning

- Link points
- Indicator words for claims
 - Therefore, thus, hence, so, as a result
- Indicator words for reasons
 - Because, since, on account of, for, in view of, for the reason that
- Indicator words additive/adversative
 - Finally, in addition, similarly
 - On the other hand, however, although, while



Structure your argument

- Reasons for and evidence/Reasons against and evidence
- Compare & contrast
- Outline of points
- Handouts
- Try it!

Introduction:		
Main themes:		
Areas to be compare and contrast	A	B
Similarities		
1		
2		
3		
4		
Differences		
1		
2		
3		
4		
Significance of these		
Conclusion:		



Develop your argument

- Use body paragraphs & topic sentences
- Use source material – reliable evidence
- Show line of reasoning
 - link points
 - central guiding line
- Show awareness of complexities
 - Counter arguments, relativism
- Your conclusions
 - based on evidence
 - No new claims



Steps in constructing argument

- Analyse topic
- Write down your working thesis
 - Your point of view in relation to topic
 - Keep thesis prominent
- Organise your argument
- Develop argument
- Document points and claims
- Reference or bibliography

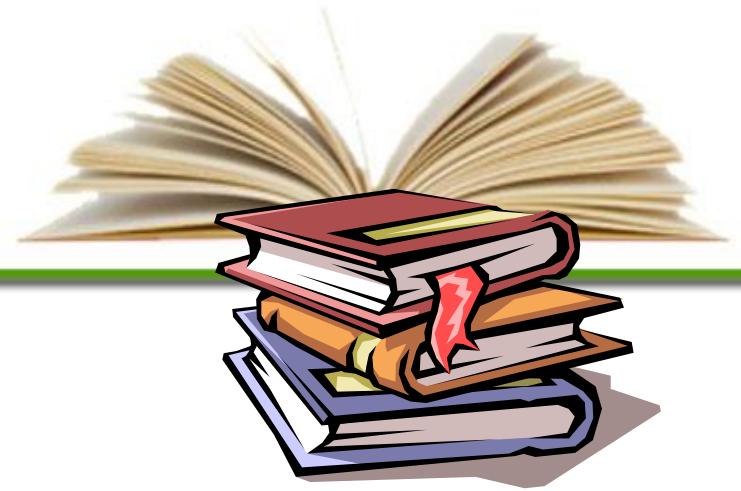


Reporting the work of others

- Making use of the ideas of other people is one of the most important aspects of academic writing because
- it shows awareness of other people's work;
- it shows that you can use their ideas and findings;
- it shows you have read and understood the material you are reading;
- it shows where your contribution fits in;
- it supports the points you are making.

(Gillet 2008, in O'Sullivan & Cleary 2010)

References



Why?

- Credit sources of information & ideas
- Reader can locate for further information if required
- Validate arguments
- Increase and spread knowledge
- Show depth, breadth & quality of your reading!



Further information

- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>
- <http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk>
- <http://writing.umn.edu>
- Linking words:
http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/Resources/la/QuickClicks%20Repository/LC_worksheet_linking%20words.pdf
- <http://www.learningdevelopment.plymouth.ac.uk/wrasse/> - samples
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