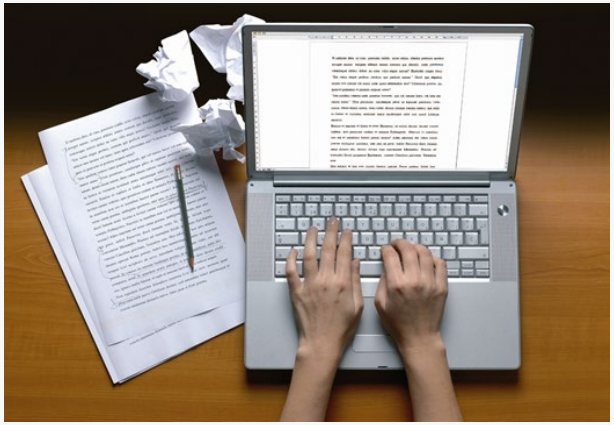
Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Introduction:
Reading, Thinking & Writing Critically



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SLD
Student Learning Development

Today's Objectives

- Recognise the characteristics of critical thinking
- Consider how to develop critical thinking
- Using critical thinking in writing

Check your assumptions

If a plane crashed on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic, where would the survivors be buried?

At a party, you meet a woman who can predict perfectly the score of any match, in any sport, before it is played. How is this possible?

From Bransford, J.D. & Stein, B.S. (1984)

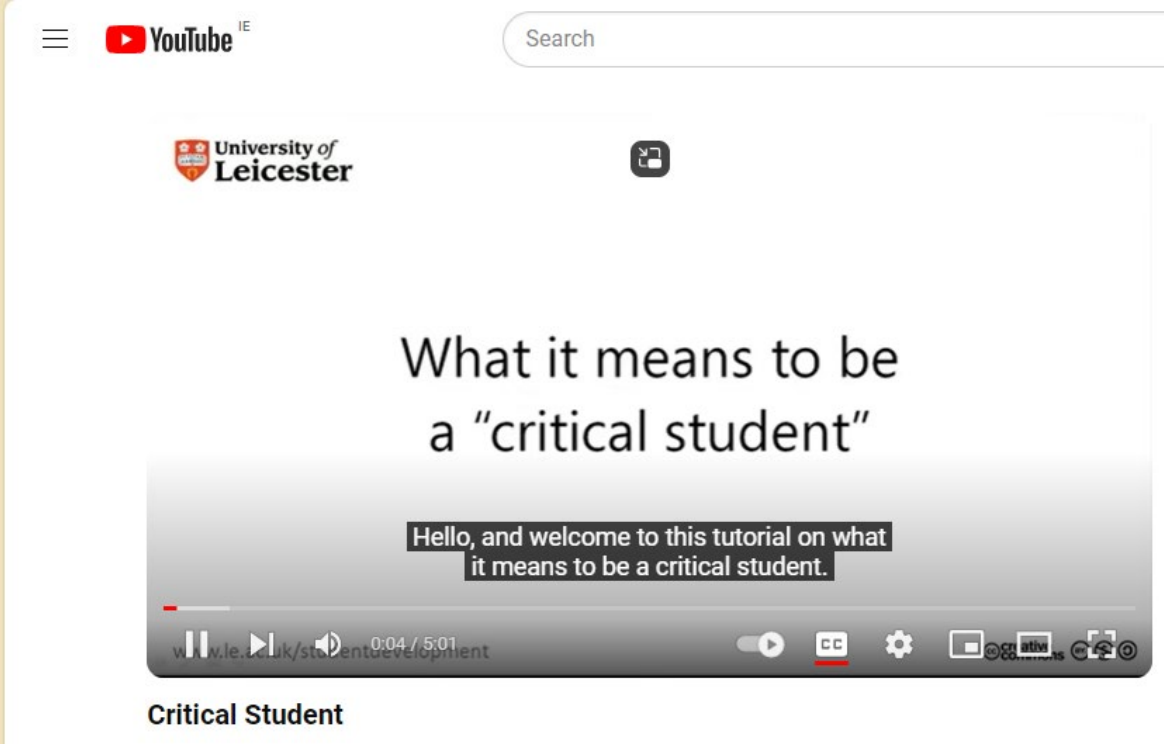
What is critical thinking?

- Critical thinking ≠ negative
- Critical thinking = reflection, analysis and evaluation
- Using these skills at every level of the researching and writing process

What it means to be a critical student

University of Leicester

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVLjziA5U2o



Being critical

An objective, informed judgement

Jamie Oliver:

“As expected, I'm far from impressed with the government's empty, pointless obesity strategy. It's clear they don't know what to do and are incapable of any vision.”

“As expected” = bias
“Empty, pointless” = value judgements

Jamie Oliver:

“Simply telling people what they already know – that they need to eat less and move more – is a complete cop out. The country's bill of health is shocking, and it's not going to get any better over the next 30 years if a clearly-defined plan isn't put into place soon. We simply can't afford the financial or health costs of doing nothing.”

“The country's bill of health is shocking” = colloquial language, no evidence given

Being objective

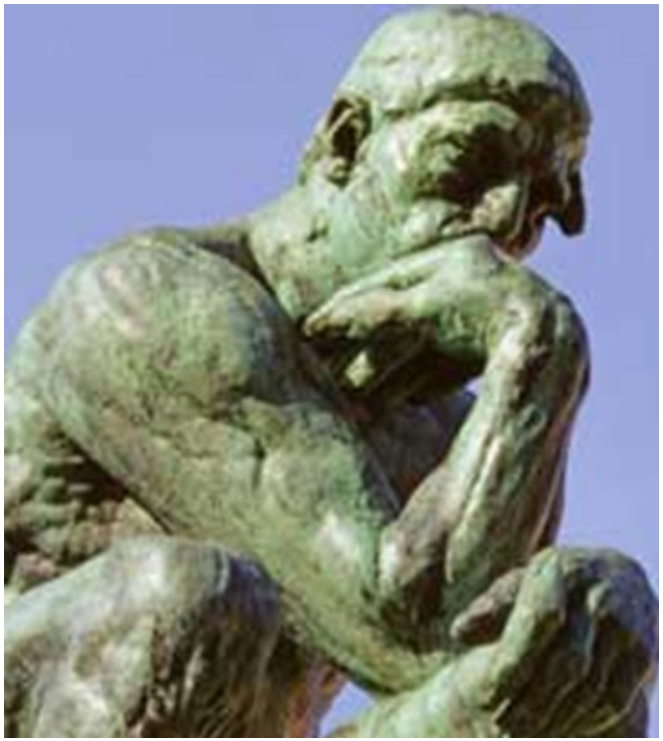
- Examining all sides of the argument or question
- Taking into account conflicting information or arguments
- Being aware of biases (including your own)

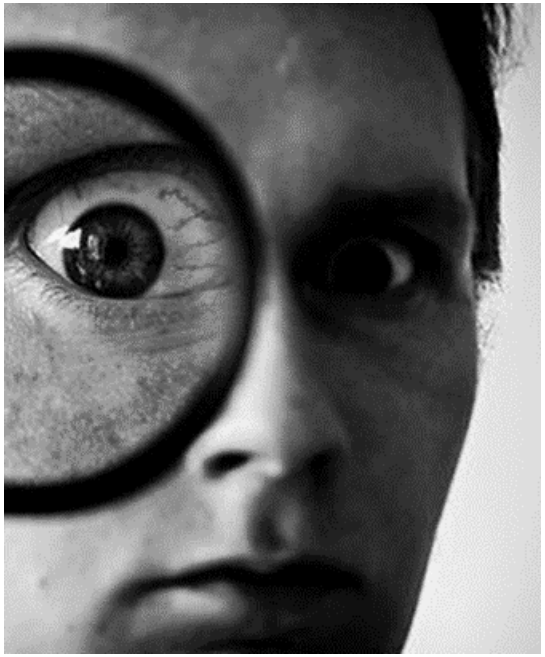
Being informed

- Showing your expertise
- Bringing multiple forms of knowledge or information together
- Engaging with research in your field

When to be critical

- Reading primary and secondary sources
- Reviewing your lecture and research notes
- Deciding on an essay question or assignment prompt and how to answer it
- Generating a thesis statement or research question
- Viewing GenAI material

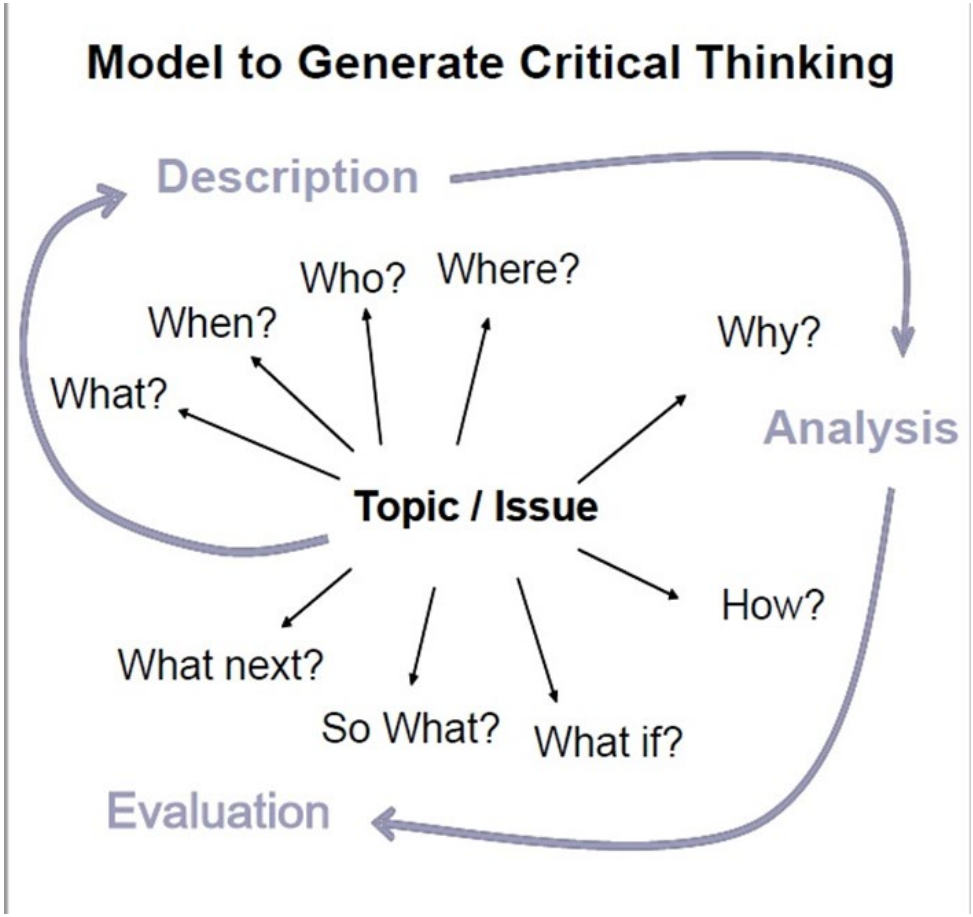




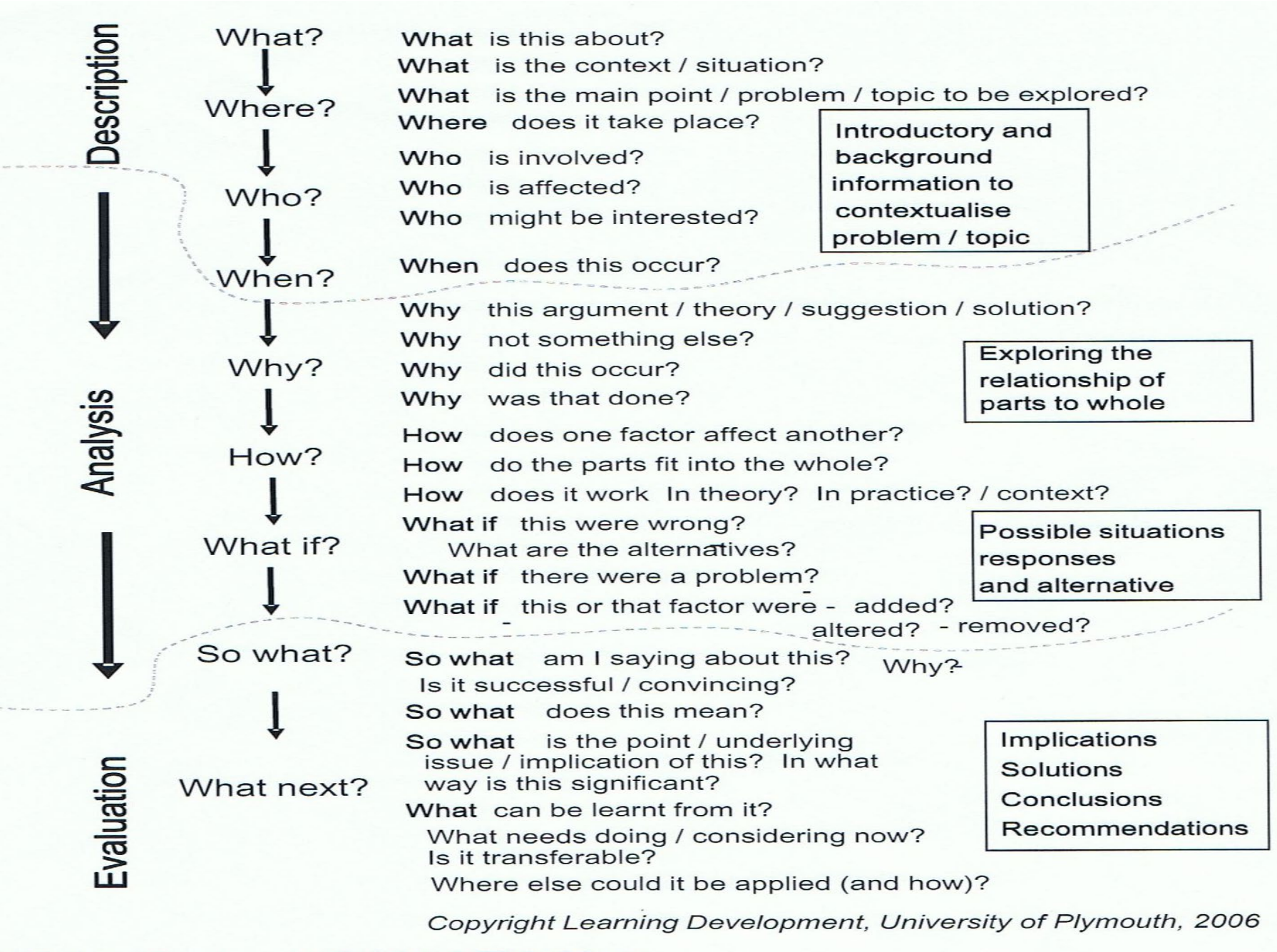
- What?
- Why?
- What evidence?
- Do you agree?

quality of evidence = quality of data + quality of interpretation

Strategies for thinking critically



From Plymouth University, Guide to critical thinking



Strategies for thinking critically

1 **clarify** your thinking purpose and context
2 **question** your sources of information
3 **identify** arguments
4 **analyse** sources and arguments
5 **evaluate** the arguments of others and
6 **create** or **synthesise** your own arguments.

As the image illustrates, critical thinking skills and attributes are interconnected and need to work together for your critical thinking to be effective.

From Monash University, "Critical Thinking" **https://www.monash.edu/student-academic-success/enhance-your-thinking/critical-thinking/what-is-critical-thinking**

1. Am I looking at valid and reliable sources?

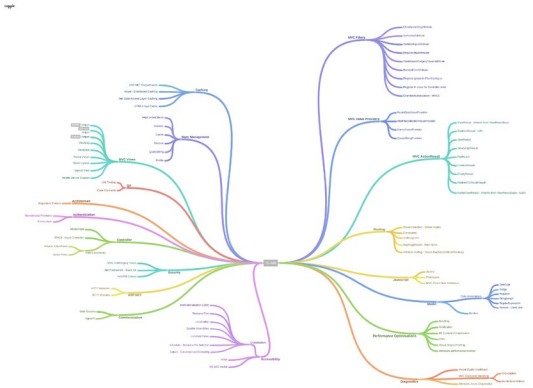
2. Am I presenting a balanced view on the subject and looking at all evidence to build up my argument or is my point of view biased or skewed?

3. Is the argument I am presenting reasonable and is there evidence to support it?

4. Is there any bias or ambiguity in the language used which could influence or prejudice people?

Generating critical thinking

- Mind-mapping/diagramming
- Freewriting
- Talk aloud/audio recording
- Post-it notes



‘We are not allowed to give our own opinions, are we?’

Your initial thoughts

+

analysis of and **reference to** theories, evidence, data, examples, case studies, principles and counter arguments

+

more of your thought

=

✓ critical thinking

Ways of being critical in writing

- Indicating **weaknesses or fallacies** in argumentation or data:

  Is the argument less than convincing? Why or why not? How does the writer present their argument? Are they clear?

  From University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill: Arguments and Fallacies

- Thinking about the **limitations** of an argument or study:

  Could the scope be broader? Who performed the research and who or what was included? Is there anything about the research that indicates biases are at play (funding, affiliation, etc.).

Ways of being critical in writing

- Thinking about how things could have been done differently:

  If there are limitations or biases present, how can they be avoided in the future? Consider the opposite outcome—what impact would that have?

- Considering counterarguments:

  Take into account opposing thought on the topic and how it relates to your argument or question.

From Harvard College Writing Center: Counterargument

Example synthesis

The elusive bilby has provoked considerable disagreement over such essential facts as whether it is diurnal or nocturnal, and what constitutes its staple diet. Smith (1970) considered them to be nocturnal whereas Jones (1972) reported that they are daytime foragers. Smith (1970) also reported bilbies had a fondness for chocolate but his findings were rejected by both Jones (1972) and Wheeler (1974). Jones believed bilbies eat beetles, and Wheeler thought that apples were the staple food. However, neither chocolate nor apples are indigenous to the bilby habitat and it seems improbable that they are the main foodstuffs for bilbies.

Eucalyptus leaves, on the other hand, are widely available in the bilby region …..

(From Dunn, 2007, p. 8)

Writing statements to support your argument

A number of researchers have noted that assignment tasks help students to learn the language of their subject. (your statement) For instance, Smith and Jones (2002, p. 27) found that students who do assignments demonstrate a better use of the terminology of their subject when they write in their exams than students who do only exam assessment. (evidence to support your statement)

From https://aso-resources.une.edu.au/academic-writing-course/information-basics/supporting-evidence/

Writing about the opposing ideas

Some educators argue that assignments are time consuming to mark (your opposing statement). However, evidence from student feedback surveys finds that students value this feedback more than any other learning experience in their courses (Jackson & Peters, 2008) (counter evidence to support your opposing position).

From https://aso-resources.une.edu.au/academic-writing-course/information-basics/supporting-evidence/

Structuring critical thinking

- Critical Thinking will be threaded throughout your writing:
- This important work will inform your thesis statement (introduction)
- It will also make up the body of your essay/assignment
- Organise into a logical structure—build your argument paragraph by paragraph

Using critical language

- Use of language and phrases can help frame critical thinking in our writing

- Phrasing should be formal and polite—remember critical thinking does not mean being negative or harsh

Academic Phrasebank, "Being Critical" Phrases

www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk

In academic writing, the strength of the claims researchers make is dependent on the amount of evidence there is to support the claim or the degree of certainty felt by the researcher. The words used to indicate these degrees of certainty are words such as the modal verbs *would, should, may, can,* the adverbs and adjectives *possibly, possible*; the verbs *believe, suggest, consider;* and nouns such as *belief, possibility, assumption,* and *claim.* These words and constructions allow you to signal a degree of *uncertainty* in the claims you put forward, or to signal higher degrees of *certainty.*

Linguistic 'tools' to help signal levels of certainty/uncertainty	Example sentences	Explanation
any unqualified verbs	The results *indicate that* …	*High degree of certainty*
Is/are	The present results *are* evidence that…	*High degree of certainty*
suggest	The present results *suggest* that …	*Medium degree of certainty*
can	The present results *can* also be used to address Piaget's (1959) claims.	*Medium degree of certainty*
could	The findings *could* indicate that…	*Low degree of certainty*
may	The findings *may* suggest that ….	*Low degree of certainty*
possibly	The work is *possibly* indicative of…	*Low degree of certainty*

Thesis writing: Persuasion (uow.edu.au)

Using Critical Language: Evaluation

‘This study is a timely/productive/significant/influential examination of XYZ’.

‘The author challenges/criticises XYZ and provides a comprehensive argument regarding ABC’.

Using Critical Language: Showing Limitations

‘X fails to consider Y’.

‘This study is limited by XYZ’.

‘The author might have taken into account XYZ in order to adequately address the concept of ABC’.

Building critical thinking in a paragraph

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]

From: www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/writing/general/essay/sample-essay/index.xml

Grading

Grade		Between	
I	First	70%	100%
II.1	Two-One	60%	69%
II.2	Two-Two	50%	59%
III	Third	40%	49%
F1*	Fail	30%	39%
F2*	Fail	0%	29%
NS†	Non-Satisfacory		

II.I

Good grasp of subject

Critical & Analytical thinking

Logical Clear Presentation

Nearly all key points

I

Thorough, **deep understanding**

Critical thinking, insight, creativity

Well written

All points acknowledged

Grading

Grade		Between	
I	First	70%	100%
II.1	Two-One	60%	69%
II.2	Two-Two	50%	59%
III	Third	40%	49%
F1*	Fail	30%	39%
F2*	Fail	0%	29%
NS†	Non-Satisfacory		

F

Little Factual Content & Errors

III

Knowledge Facts, but little insight

Narrow/ **No critical thought**

Poorly written / incoherent

II.II

Solid Answer

Knowledge beyond lectures

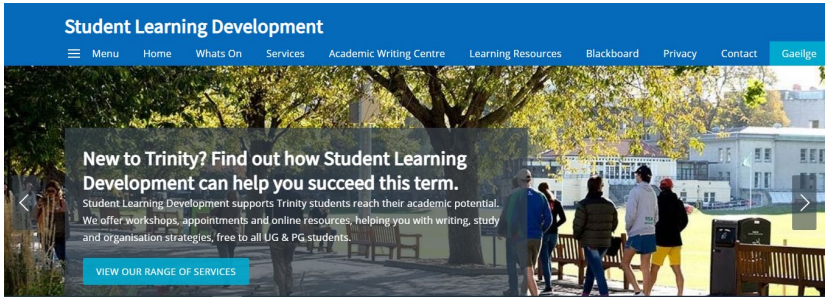
Good on facts

Writing good, some structure

Questions

Where to find us

Visit our website at:
http://www.tcd.ie/sld



Email us at:
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Enrol on Blackboard module:
Academic Skills for Successful Learning
See our website for instructions

Thank you. Feedback, please!

https://eu.surveymonkey.com/r/SLDWorkshop