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Critical thinking skills

- **Identify the line of reasoning in the text** what argument is it making? What point of view is it expressing?
- Critically evaluate the line of reasoning
 - Does it contain relevant, contributing and sufficient propositions (reasons)?
 - o Does it contain logical progression?
 - o Does it contain false premises?
 - o Does it contain flawed reasoning?

Questioning surface appearances and checking for hidden assumptions or agendas

- o Is the evidence what it appears to be?
- Might there be other explanations apart from the obvious one?
- Has all necessary information been given, or might other details lead to a different conclusion?
- Are there interested parties who would gain if the conclusions were accepted?
- o Are there hidden assumptions or agendas?
- Does the evidence come from a reliable, disinterested source?

• Identifying evidence in the text

- o Evaluating the evidence according to valid criteria
- o Date
- Source
- Check for bias
- Beware statistics and numbers:
 - most/many
 - Percentages
 - Sample size
 - Representativeness
 - Conditions of data collection
 - Emotive language and persuader words
- Identifying the writer's conclusions
- Deciding whether the evidence given supports these conclusions

From: Cottrell, Stella (2003) <u>The Study Skills Handbook</u>. Second Edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan pp.222-229

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The main points which characterise criticism are:

- agreeing with, or defending a position, or confirming its usefulness through an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses;
- conceding that an existing approach or point of view has some merits which can be useful, but that others need to be rejected;
- focusing on ideas, theories and arguments and not on the author of those arguments, so as to produce careful, considered and justified evaluation;
- being aware of your own critical stance; identifying your reasons for selecting the work you have criticised and recognising the weaknesses of your critique;
- selecting elements from existing arguments and reformulating them to form a synthesis: a new point of view on some subject matter;
- finding fault in an argument by identifying fallacies, inadequacies, lack of evidence or lack of plausibility;
- identifying errors in a criticism made by another to provide correction and balanced criticism thereby advocating the usefulness of the original work and reasons for rejecting the criticism made of it.

From: Hart, Chris (1998) <u>Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Imagination</u>. London: Sage p.176

Additional sources:

- Cottrell, Stella (2011) <u>Critical Thinking Skills: Developing Effective Analysis and Argument</u>. Basingstoke: Palgrave
- Thompson, Anne (2008) <u>Critical Reasoning: A Practical Introduction</u>. 3rd Edition. London: Routledge

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