

How do I write more critically: the essentials.

Before you write:

- ❖ Read critically, looking for the author's:
 - Argument and evidence;
 - Rhetoric or use of language;
 - Bias or objectivity;
 - Assumptions or problems with ideas.
- ❖ Make connections between different things you have read or learnt.
- ❖ Compare and contrast different things you have read or learnt about.
- ❖ Respond to what you read by considering whether you agree or not and why.
- ❖ In response to your assignment brief, develop an argument or a stance based on your reading.

When you write:

- ❖ Plan your structure in relation to your argument: what do you need to say in order to prove or develop your point?
- ❖ Include other points of view, not only those that support your argument;
 - Select the most important: don't discuss every alternative interpretation.
- ❖ Refute those points of view: explain why they are wrong or flawed.
- ❖ Develop your points through evidence.
- ❖ Talk through some of the evaluations, comparisons and relationships you identified when reading;
 - Decide which are central to the question; don't mention every thought.
- ❖ Reach a conclusion on the basis of these evaluations and discussions.

The example below is a paragraph taken from an essay, written in response to the brief: "Environmental activism is ineffective. Discuss with reference to a range of literature." The content of each sentence has been broken down to show the different techniques used.

In this example one argument is described and summarised:

Boyle (2016) argues that, despite its long pedigree, nonviolent protest has failed to prevent environmental injustices such as factory farming and ecocide.

Then, it is applied to the question:

This suggests that some forms of activism have not always been effective.

Learning Development

This sentence uses evidence from two sources where both authors agree:

De Moor (2018) identifies an 'efficacy dilemma', in which the success of activists is constrained by the limiting factor of identifying who is empowered to create environmental change. In addition to this, the effectiveness of activism based on direct action has often been challenged, with actions that cause disruption losing public support (Kinniburgh, 2020).

In this sentence the evidence is connected to the question:

This suggests that environmental activism needs to build awareness of its audience and develop a targeted approach to be effective.

Here the cited source disagrees:

However, Ockwell *et al.* (2009) see activism as having a more indirect effect by encouraging the public to put pressure on governments who would otherwise be slow to create new environmental legislation.

Finally, the concluding sentence provides a summary based on the evidence:

Thus, while the effects of environmental activism may be hard to gauge directly, perhaps a focus on its wider cultural impacts is necessary.