Pre session polls

What level of study are you?
- Access
- Level 1
- Level 2
- Level 3
- Postgraduate

What would you consider is your main area of study?
- Arts
- Languages (English & other)
- Social sciences
- Business and law
- Science
- Engineering or technology
- Maths
- Health sciences
- Education
- Sports
- OTHER

Have you been to any student hub live online events before?
- No (I’m brand new!)
- No (but have listened to one or more recording)
- No (didn’t have time)
- No (wasn’t aware of before now)
- Yes autumn 2020
- Yes any pre summer 2020
- Yes any 2019 or before
What are student hub live online sessions?

- All student hub live sessions are non modular and focus on skills relevant to study at university level.
- Polls are anonymous to other participants but the chat box will have your logged in name associated with your comments during the live session.
- All online sessions are recorded and available to view on catch up on a public facing website.
- Slides are available to download during the session (not accessible on mobile devices) and from [http://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/](http://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/).
student hub live is the OU’s live online interactive platform to support academic community

Isabella Henman is an essay writing aficionado and skills trainer and has been the main student hub live online speaker since 2017. She tutors in science and health sciences at Access to level 2.

Rob Moore works on a range of under-graduate and post-graduate modules for the Open University Business School. Rob's passion is in making live online sessions fun and effective.
Study spaces?

• Do you want to share a picture of your study space to encourage others?
• We are looking to share during our next live show on 18\textsuperscript{th} January.
• Please email them through to \texttt{studenthub@open.ac.uk} if you are happy to share.
Initial polls

What is your main reason for coming along to this session?

(If you are on a mobile device remember you need to tap into the polling option)

To come back to these slides after completing a poll click on the share pod slides icon
Critical thinking and writing
Critical thinking is a key academic skill and involves evaluating information and articulating how well it explains a concept or is fit for purpose. The benefits of developing your critical thinking and writing skills include being able to show why you have referenced something and demonstrating a robust level of understanding.

We’ll explain some of the things tutors look for which evidence this, as well as some of the indicators that this is not being done.
Workshop

• This is going to be a structured workshop to help you get thinking critically.
• We’re going to start off with an example of everyday critical thinking.
• Then we’ll give some tutor advice.
• You’ll get the chance to discuss with others in a small group.
Session purpose

**Is for:**
- Covering general advice about critical thinking as a concept
- Give some guidance about how to look at different sides and provide evidence
- Provide a space to share ideas and connect with other students

**Is not for:**
- Telling you what you HAVE to do
- Providing any module specific advice
Please be aware

- These sessions are large scale
- They are very busy
- There is lots of interaction
- They are not the same as other tutorials
- You can maximise slides on your own screen by clicking the icon
Please

• Do NOT share any personal information in the chat pod during the session
• On the recording names will be anonymised to user number
• However if you type anyone’s full name or any other personal information in the chat pod it can be seen by everybody and it would also show up on the recording
First thoughts

• In which part of your university study do you want to become more critical? Please use the short answer poll pod provided
Our ideas

• Essays 😊
• Evaluating different theories
• Note taking
Activity 1

- You have £20 to spend on your best friend’s birthday.
- You need to think about what affects how you will spend this money.
- Please use the short answer poll available to suggest points that are relevant to how you spend the money.
- Remember to scroll to see other answers and see what others think
Buying my best friend's birthday present

- How can I show what they mean to me?
- Past experience of presents versus time?
- When do I see them?
- What do they like?
- Is it just about the present?
- Experience?
- Combine with others?
- Go out?
- Amount: £20
- How can I maximise this?
- Sales?
- Discount
- Do they mind?
- How can I ask?
- Anyone else might know?
- Do they like surprises?
Drawing these together

• What is the purpose?
• What is relevant to meet the purpose?
• What is not relevant to that purpose?
Critical analysis

- This is a higher level skill that gains more marks than anything else.
- It means looking at the information and evaluating it and considering whether it allows you to answer the question fully.
- It is a questioning process – who said what? Does what they say have value? Did they miss something out? Has someone else said something that completely disagrees with them? Have I read something that disagrees with them?
Critical analysis hints

• It isn’t about ripping something to shreds
• It is about evidencing your assertions
• If you ascribe to one person’s theory as presented what is it about it that is convincing? Have you looked at what might not be right about it? is there anything missing?
• Is the view / evidence important because of the amount of people that agree or something else?
Critical evaluation – when and where

Difference between being descriptive and critical.

A description or observation could be that a study had a small population or was carried out on rats. Fair enough but so what? Why does that really matter?
Description

- This is saying **what** something is
- It gives facts and details overall
Evaluation

• This says **why** something is, or **how**
• So rather than saying this is a great bar of dark chocolate (which gives an idea / opinion but there is no analysis of that)
• Better is this is a great bar of dark chocolate which has a smooth taste and makes me happy
• There is some analysis there along with a reason why
• You don’t have to necessarily add lots of words (as in this example), as long as you address the how and why
Critical writing

- Objective
- Third person
- Not opinionated
- Weighing up against other point (evaluation)
- Providing evidence for assertions
Evaluation within a paragraph

The highest levels of critical evaluation will take information and present it in a way that shows the evaluation within the paragraph. So not just presenting and describing but showing why it is important.
Look again

The highest levels of critical evaluation will take information and present it in a way that shows the evaluation within the paragraph. So not just presenting and describing but showing why it is important.

This paragraph actually tried to demonstrate that evaluation – I explained how and why in the process of giving the information.

I could have just left it at the first paragraph which said what is but not why it is

Everyone clear on that? 😊 😞
Evaluation between paragraphs

An essay is a coherent overall piece of information. As well as using information within the paragraph on a topic, each separate paragraph needs to link together and support that topic. All work together for the main aim. There is no ‘name dropping’ or shoe horning in of information, everything is relevant and clearly so.

Paragraphs are separate but cannot be disconnected.
Putting it into practice

• With our favourite topic!
• We’ll show 2 different ways of approaching a similar set of information. Read carefully and try to make some notes on what the key differences are (we’ll have a poll for that after the 2nd example)
• Be aware this is not just about the facts but the evaluation of those facts, remembering the rules of critical evaluation not being opinionated and providing evidence
The history of the use of chocolate in secretive religious ceremonies is very interesting as priests used the chocolate drink with their rich and powerful friends. The Aztecs even used the cocoa bean as money. The drink was brought over to Europe in the 1600s and special ‘chocolatl’ houses were set up where only these rich people could drink it. I think this is totally unfair as the poor didn’t get to taste it and chocolate’s great.
Example 2

Chocolate has been used within religious ceremonies both as a reward and a means of conveying favour upon the recipient. Through the perception of the cocoa bean as a luxury item the association with privilege enhances the idea that religion and its objects are special. This idea is further supported by the history of the ‘chocolatl’ shops in Europe where the expensive drink was restricted to those able to pay and emphasised the importance of these people within society.
What’s the difference?

- Using the short answer polling pod available suggest what the main differences between the 2 examples were (in terms of style and purpose rather than absolute number of words)
- Remember the points about critical writing
Our ideas

• 1 was a bit more opinionated and general – it was more descriptive as it said what was but didn’t give evidence.
• 2 did give evaluation and evidence
• The language of 2 was more formal and academic style
What’s the difference?

• Critical analysis looks at why and how and questions the information for its value.
• Not just what it is but why and how it is.
• Remember it is not just about describing or listing pieces of factual information. It is evaluating them and showing how they are important and relating them to each other and the overall topic.
• Unless you are asked to give your personal opinion then please don’t!
What are tutors looking for?

- A clear indication you know what is important and have been able to link this to the overall context and purpose of the piece of writing.
- If you are using evidence you have selected appropriate aspects of it e.g. not just namedropped, and have referenced correctly and fully.
- Convincing writing that shows that you know what you are talking about and haven’t just stumbled across a bit of information that you are regurgitating.
Structure ideas

- **PEE**
  - Point – make it
  - Evidence – support it with facts
  - Explain – why the evidence is supportive and it is relevant

Or

- **PESELS**
  - Point - make the point for this paragraph
  - Explain - what do you mean by this point
  - Support - provide evidence from studies and research
  - Evaluate - what is there about this point that is for/against
  - Link - to the essay task
  - Signpost - to the next paragraph
Indicators that critical thinking isn’t there

- Close paraphrasing of the content
- Description rather than evaluation
- Personal opinion
- Too little information e.g. just a citation after a brief assertion “the history of chocolate relates to religion (Henman, 2019)” ermm how does it? Can the reader be expected to understand based on the information that is actually included
Discussion activity

• Now that you have some ideas and suggestions about critical thinking what do you think will be the aspect that you are going to be developing for your critical writing?

• Please bring back a few points that you can share with the rest of the group

• We can then try and discuss some of the common points

• You do not have to speak on mic if you don’t want to but please do interact with your group using the chat option
Useful points for breakouts

• We suggest you use the first couple of minutes to introduce yourselves and get used to the room. Choose a volunteer to keep the discussion on track and feed back to the main room.

• If you want to speak you will need to activate your microphone once in the room and you see the option available.

• Breakout groups work best if people engage and contribute and discuss.

• There will be ~10 minutes for the breakouts overall – we’ll send regular reminders to let you know how long you have got left.
Breakout activity

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• Please bring back a few points that you can share with the rest of the group.

• You do not have to speak on mic if you don’t want to but please do interact with your group using the chat option.

Remember to check the number of the room you are in (shows at top of chat pod as “chat x BREAKOUT y”) in case of connection issues and for bringing back information.
This session is currently in breakouts (small groups).

If you are part of this group and have had connection issues please let us know your room number in the chat box.

If you are only just arriving in this room then unfortunately you have missed the main session. Please log back out and watch the recording which will be available later today.
So....

- What can people share from their sessions?
Alternative discussion activity

• There will be 2 specific questions in chat pods for you to explore some of the elements we have discussed further.

• The best tip I have picked up about critical thinking is…

• I am going to develop my critical thinking and writing by…

• You are welcome to add your thoughts and we will then pick up some of the themes and talk through them.

• Chat does have names on but the recording will be anonymised so you will appears as ‘user number’
Take home message

• Critical writing does require a good understanding of the topic (which takes time!)
• The key is evaluation rather than basic description, e.g. saying how and why rather than just what
Final polls

What do you feel is the main thing you will take away from this session?
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Upcoming 2021 sessions

16\textsuperscript{th} Feb 12pm Effective academic communication
24\textsuperscript{th} Feb 7pm Essay planning
10\textsuperscript{th} March 7pm Essay writing

More to be announced

Details and booking information from http://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/

Past student hub live online study skills sessions here
Visit us at http://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/ and subscribe for events as they are announced. Send us feedback at studenthub@open.ac.uk