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Study, Write, Present

SEMINAR SERIES



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

Developing a Critical Argument

PRESENTED BY

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Workshop Questions

WHAT DOES 'DEVELOPING A CRITICAL ARGUMENT' MEAN?

What does being 'critical' mean?

How is being 'critical' different from being 'descriptive'?

What is an 'argument'?

How does one build an argument?

In which part of one's essay/report does one place an argument?



WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

Critical thinking is the attempt to ask and answer questions systematically

THIS MEANS

- Asking the most useful questions in the most productive sequence in order to yield a coherent and credible “story”
- Asking questions instead of accepting “at face value” what you write or read
- Separating reliable facts from false assumptions
- Looking for evidence and good reason before believing something to be true

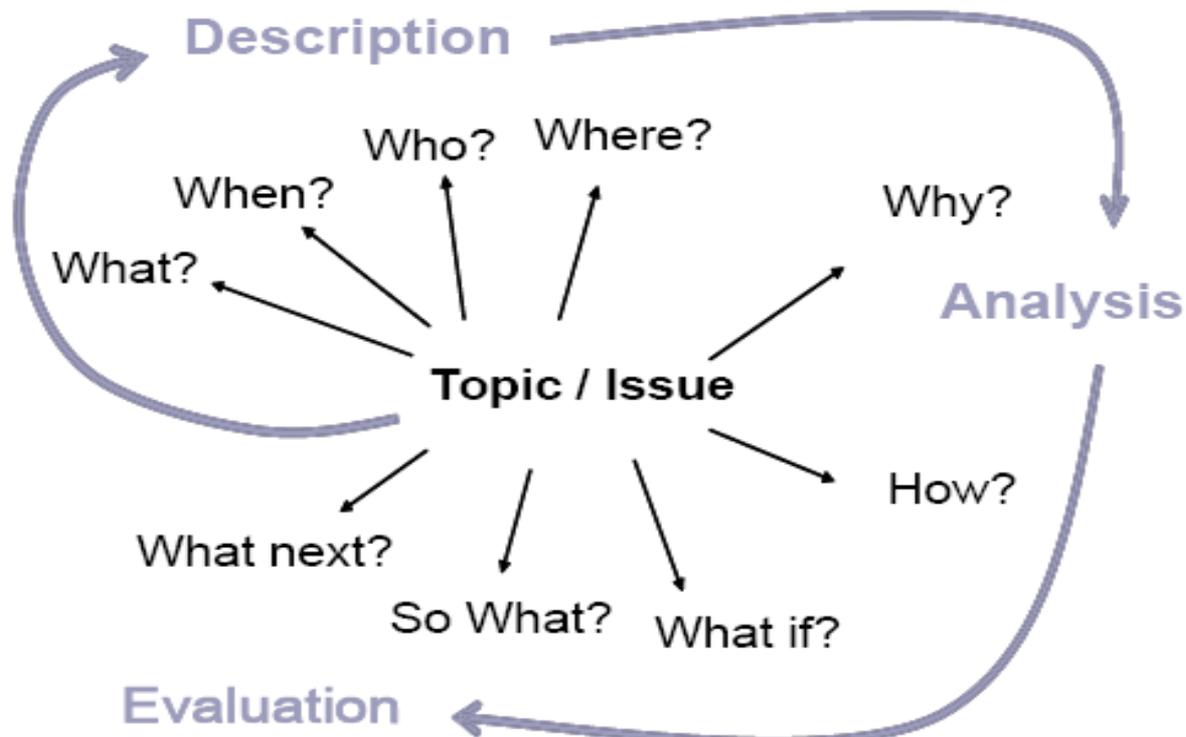


What's happening in this picture?



AS WITH THE PICTURE

any issue raises a number of questions



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A Critical Thinking Model



DESCRIPTION

WHAT?



WHERE?



WHO?



WHEN?



HOW?



What is this about?
What is the context / situation?
What is the main point / problem / topic to be explored?

Where does it take place?

Who is this by?
Who is involved?
Who is affected?
Who might be interested?

When does it occur?

How did this occur?
How does it work in theory?
How does it work in practice / context?
How does one factor affect another? Or,
How do the parts fit into the whole?

Introductory and background information to contextualize problem / topic.

Exploration of relationship of parts to whole.

ANALYSIS

A Critical Thinking Model



ANALYSIS

WHY?



WHAT IF?

Why did this occur?
Why was that done?
What is the argument / theory / suggestion / solution?
What if this were wrong?
What are the alternatives?
What if there were a problem?
What if this or that factor were – added / removed / altered?

Possible situations
and alternative
response?

EVALUATION

SO WHAT?



WHAT NEXT?

What does this mean?
Why is this significant?
Is this convincing? Why/ why not?
What are the implications?
Is it successful?
How does it meet the criteria?
Is it transferable?
How and where else can it be applied?
What can be learnt from it?
What needs doing now?

Implications
Solutions
Conclusions
Recommendations

WHY THINK CRITICALLY?

- Innovate
- Find solutions to problems
- Gain a better understanding of an issue
- See different perspectives



What do you think your lecturer/marker means when they say
‘VERY LITTLE CRITICAL ANALYSIS’?

- Very descriptive
- Not analytical
- Lack of evaluation

What is an ‘argument’?

In academic reading and writing,
an ‘argument’ is **A POSITION**
taken in response to a question. It
is a claim that is **SUPPORTED**
BY EVIDENCE.

1. CREATE A CLEAR STRUCTURE

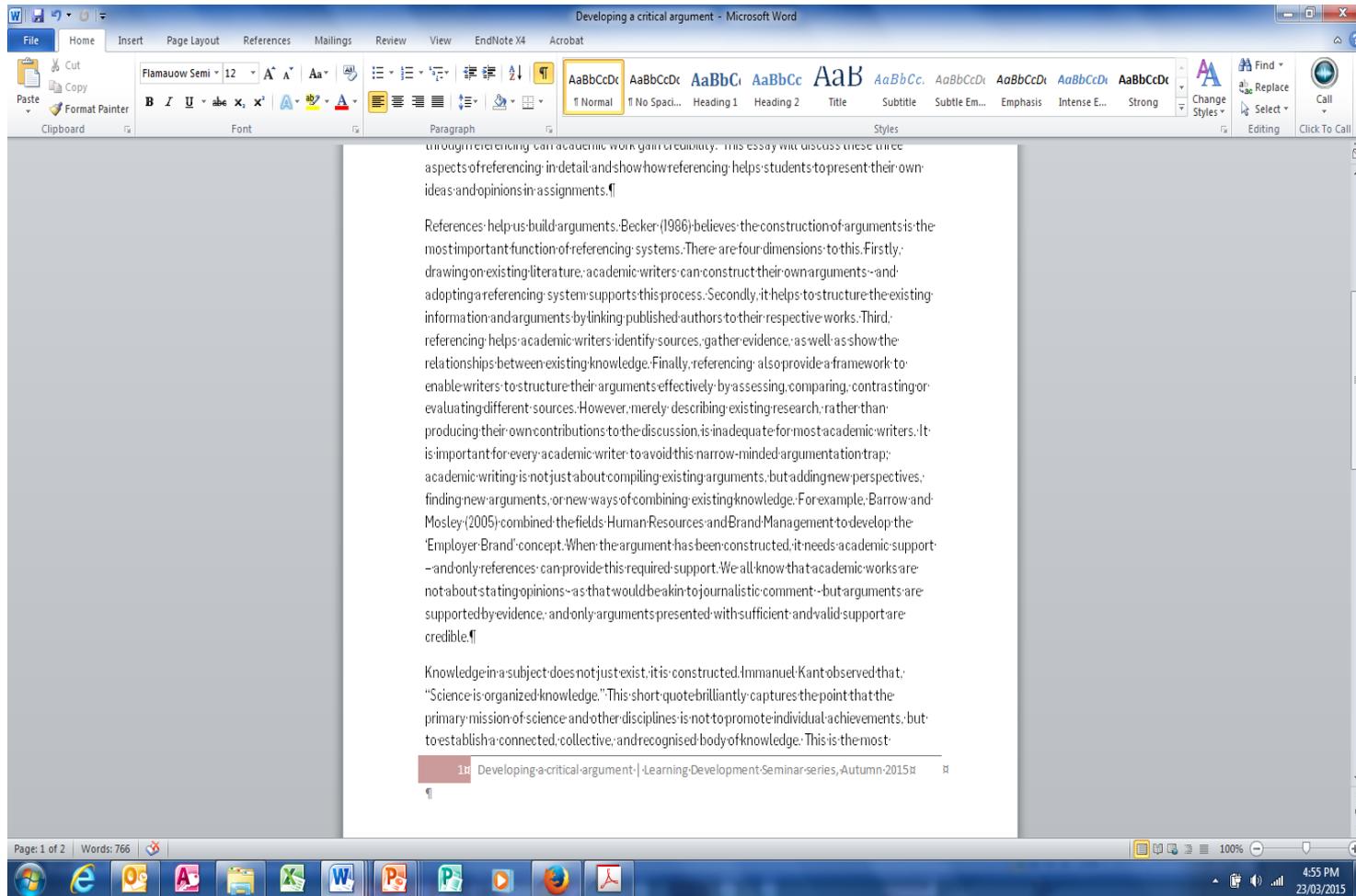


STRUCTURING AN ARGUMENT

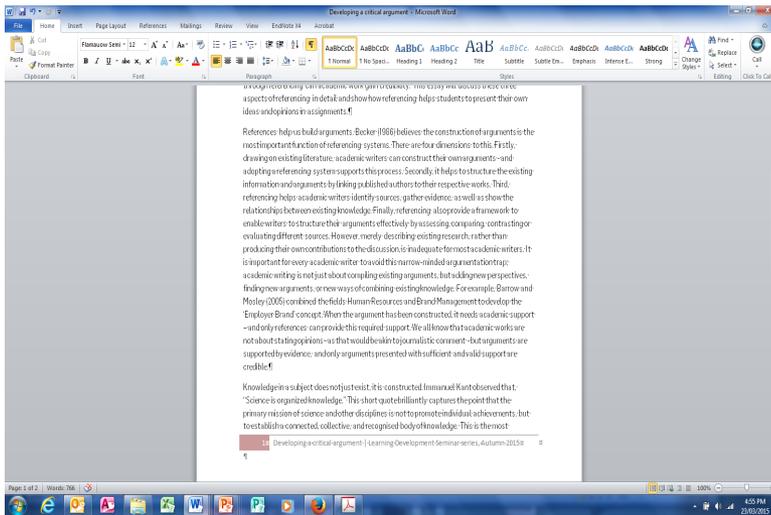
Introduction	Context for argument Thesis statement Brief summary of main points/arguments/topics of the essay
Body	Paragraph 1: Topic sentence/claim Supporting evidence Explanation Link Paragraph 2: Topic sentence/claim Supporting evidence Explanation Link Paragraph 3: Topic sentence/claim Supporting evidence Explanation Link Etc
Conclusion	Restatement or summary of the main points and a final statement



Essay for analysis



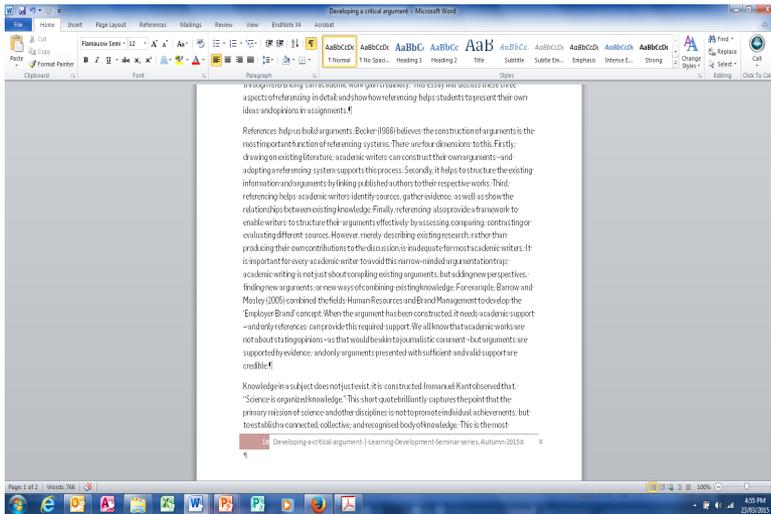
Essay for analysis



A WELL DEVELOPED ARGUMENT IN A BODY PARAGRAPH CONTAINS:

- Claim
- Justification/reason for the claim
- Relevant evidence (from academic sources)
- Analysis of the evidence
- Conclusions drawn

Essay for analysis



ANALYSE a paragraph of the essay;
underline and identify:

- **C**laim
- **J**ustification/reason for the claim
- **R**elevant evidence (from academic sources)
- **A**nalysis of the evidence
- **C**onclusions drawn

2. USE A LOGICAL SEQUENCE OF IDEAS



HOW CAN YOU DEMONSTRATE THAT YOU CAN CRITICALLY DEVELOP AN ARGUMENT?

- Take a position: make valid claims
- Support the claims using relevant, convincing evidence
- Evaluate the evidence

Fact or claim?

ARE THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES 'CLAIMS'?

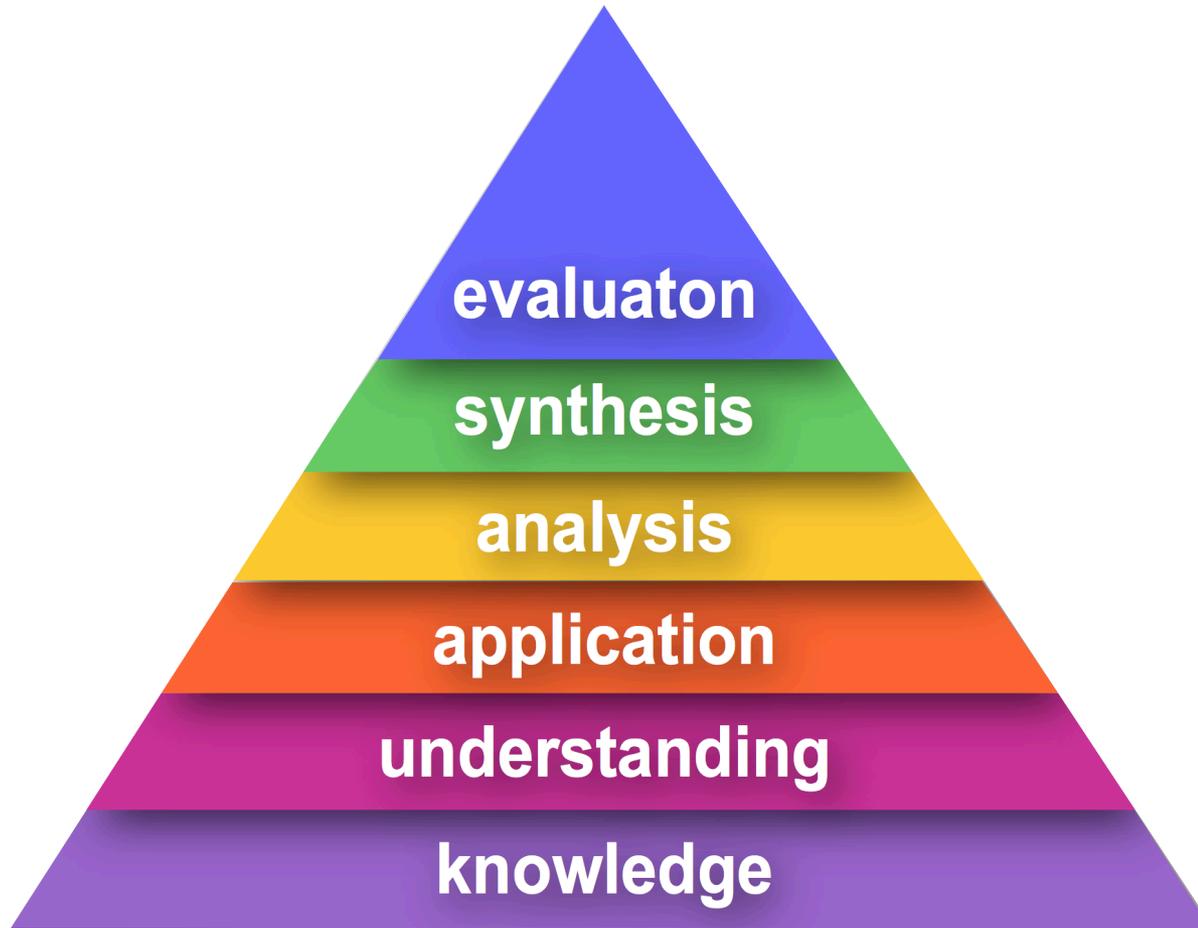
1. In 1991, there were 46 cases of violent crimes (murder, assault, rape and robbery) per 100,000 population in Singapore.
2. One of the reasons that crime in Singapore appears to be lower than elsewhere in Asia is that the data is derived solely from police reports

Characteristics of a good argument

A GOOD ARGUMENT

- Demonstrates higher order thinking
- Use relevant, credible and convincing evidence
- Makes logical connections
- Employs persuasive language : not emotional or overly subjective

Higher order thinking



3. USE LANGUAGE EFFECTIVELY



Language to help construct critical arguments:

DEGREE OF CERTAINTY

Using modality – either modal verbs or other terms – allows you to express the degree of certainty or likelihood of a particular argument or position.

Persuading with degree 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

What is the degree of certainty here?

Some studies have shown that whether mature students fare better or worse than younger students depends upon the subject being studied. Sanders (1963) has indicated that the maturity associated with increasing age and experience seems to be a positive predictor of success for some arts and social science courses. The general finding that older students do better in arts and social science and worse in science and maths is supported by Barnett, Holder and Lewis (1968), Fagin (1971), Sharon (1971) and Flecker (1959).

What is the degree of certainty here?

A number of studies during the 80s reported evidence that supports an opposing view, ie. that older students are just as successful as younger students. One study((Philips and Cullen 1985), for instance, found that those aged twenty-four and over tended to do better than the eighteen and nineteen-year-old age group. Other studies have found that older students, those who delayed entry to university for a year or two, are more successful than those who enter directly from school (Spicer & Owen 1986; Frome 1988; Reynolds 1988). Later studies, however, have reported evidence that suggests that neither of the above views can be accepted too readily: they show that the relationship between age and performance is not a linear one, in either direction(ref). This suggests that what is needed is a study that explores other parameters of success that may be impacting on the findings.

Can you weaken the degree of certainty here?

The results of the present study indicate that children between the ages of 3 and 4 years do adapt to differences in listener status and say 'thank you' more frequently to adults than to peers. This finding supports the results of previous studies in which preschoolers recognized differences in listener status and adjusted their use of politeness routines accordingly.

How is this different ?

The results of the present study **may** indicate that children between the ages of 3 and 4 years **generally** adapt to differences in listener status and **are likely** say 'thank you' more frequently to adults than to peers. This finding **partly** supports the results of previous studies in which pre-schoolers **seemed to have** recognized differences in listener status and adjusted their use of politeness routines accordingly.

Language: Cohesive devices

The **LOGIC OF THE ORGANISATION** of your argument is very important. This means how the argument **'HANGS TOGETHER' OR COHERES.**



Using signal words in paragraphs

SIGNAL WORDS tell the reader where the argument is going and show the transition from one point to another.

Contrast: in contrast, although, and yet, but, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, on the contrary, conversely, whereas, alternatively, in spite of

Emphasis: undoubtedly, indeed, true, above all, most important, the main point here is

Examples: for example, for instance, in other words, in illustration, in this case, in particular, specifically, an example of this

SIGNAL WORDS

Qualification: except for, admittedly, studies suggest that, perhaps, it would seem that, it tends to be the case that, may be, could be

Sequencing: firstly, secondly, lastly, finally, then, too

Addition: in addition, again, also, and, besides, further, furthermore, moreover, too, similarly

Concession: otherwise, admittedly, however, nevertheless, of course, after all, nonetheless, indeed

Cause and effect: accordingly, as a result, consequently, otherwise, therefore, thus, as a result, so, hence, as a consequence, thereupon

SIGNAL WORDS

Comparison: similarly, likewise, in the same manner, also, as well as

Connections in time: after a short time, afterwards, as long as, as soon as, at last, at length, at that time, at the same time, before, earlier, of late, immediately, in the meantime, lately, later, meanwhile, presently, shortly, since, soon, temporarily, thereafter, until, when, while.

Conclusion: in conclusion, to sum up, finally, lastly, to conclude, accordingly, overall

TO DEVELOP A CRITICAL ARGUMENT

- **ASK QUESTIONS**
- *THINK CRITICALLY*
- **TAKE A POSITION**
- **SUPPORT WITH EVIDENCE**
- *STRUCTURE YOUR ARGUMENT*
- **USE LANGUAGE EFFECTIVELY**
- **LINK CONCLUSION TO INTRODUCTION**

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