Developing your critical analysis

Developing your skill in critical analysis takes time, sometimes years! One way to be more effective is to honestly reflect on what you do now; recognising when you are being critical and when you are not. This can allow you to identify changes that you can make to improve your critical analysis skills.

The following exercise can be used to give you a general indication of where you are now or for a specific task, assignment or situation. For each pair of statements, identify which one you tend towards or always do. Then give a specific change you can make that would move you towards being more critical.

It is also possible to use feedback from previous assignments to complete the exercise. Complete the exercise as above, then use a different colour or mark to add what the feedback you have received has commented on. This can be really useful to identify discrepancies between what was submitted and the marker’s expectations.

For example, student X may tend to list theories in the order that they read about them, so they mark close to the descriptive quality. Thinking about their next assignment, the more critical approach for would be to discuss them chronological order and demonstrate how they have evolved using appropriate examples.

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|  | **Descriptive qualities** |  | **Critical qualities** | **Next time…** |
| *E.g.* | *Lists in any order* | *---X-----------------------* | *Structures information in order (e.g. of importance)* | *Discuss the theories in chronological order, showing how they’ve evolved* |
| 1 | Stating what happened | --------------------------- | Identifying the significance |  |
| 2 | Stating what something is like | --------------------------- | Evaluating (judges the value) strengths and weaknesses |  |
| 3 | Noting the method used | --------------------------- | Indicating whether something is suitable or not |  |
| 4 | Listing details | --------------------------- | Evaluating the relative significance of details |  |
| 5 | Stating information | --------------------------- | Drawing conclusions |  |
| 6 | Listing information in any order | --------------------------- | Structuring information in a logical order |  |
| 7 | Stating links between items | --------------------------- | Showing the relevance of links between items |  |
| 8 | Stating when something happened | --------------------------- | Identifying why timing is important |  |
| 9 | Stating the different components | --------------------------- | Judging the importance of the components |  |
| 10 | Stating options | --------------------------- | Evaluating the options and stating which should be selected |  |