

# Developing an open platform for writing support in the disciplines across the faculties

## Genre checklist of academic essays and critiques

### 1. Tackling the writing of academic essays or critiques

Have you gone through the following stages when planning your writing task?

- Make a realistic writing plan to distribute your writing workload within a timeframe.
- Analyse an assignment by breaking the writing task down into component parts: the instruction (i.e. the word or a command that introduces the assignment), the topic (i.e. the context of the discussion to be constructed), the aspect (i.e. the specific focus within the wider context of the topic), and the restriction (i.e. the limitation of the scope of discussion).
- Explore the topic in detail by creating a concept 'map' of as many related aspects as possible, reconsidering the instruction and planning your initial response to the writing task. Use your own critical thinking skills before being influenced by any literature. Analyse your own thoughts on what is important in this subject or topic.
- Search for and select relevant material for reading. Take notes and read with discrimination, as you begin the necessary reading.
- Adopt a structural approach. Possibly map out your response to the writing task by adopting one of the approaches: chronological, classification, common denominator, phased, analytical, thematic, and comparative/contrastive. It is sometimes possible to use one of these approaches within another.

(For details, refer to the *Genre guide to academic essays and critiques*.)

### 2. Structuring your academic essay and critique

Have you included the following sections and points in your academic essay or critique?

Sections	Expected moves and content
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Introduction</b> (obligatory)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Explain briefly the context of the topic/thesis;</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide background information on the topic/thesis;</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Define the professional or major terms;</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Explain your plan for addressing the topic/thesis in the essay.</li></ul> <p>✍ It is important to explain to the readers why you have decided to structure the discussion of this section the way it is. For instance, only the most</p>

	<p>important aspects are discussed due to the extensive nature of the topic/thesis and the word limit.</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Main body</b> (obligatory)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Address the topic-specific issues or arguments of the thesis;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide an analysis/evaluation of all related aspects/factors/matters, and support your arguments with evidence;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Critically review the aspects discussed to emphasise your viewpoint;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> (optional) Provide insights into possible improvement/solutions to the issues of the topic/thesis discussed or the topic-related entity of your study.</li> </ul> <p>✍ Divide this section into sub-sections to reflect various aspects of the topic.</p> <p>✍ Use (sub-)headings to help you maintain the focus of your writing in the draft, but do check if (sub-)headings are acceptable in your subject and discipline. Some assignment genres like reports accept (sub-)headings, while others may not.</p> <p>✍ Change/translate your (sub-)headings directly into topic sentences in order to connect the previous paragraph or an introduction to the next theme.</p> <p>✧ Keep your writing in this section as concise and clear as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>In Engineering essays/critiques of product evaluation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Describe the importance of topic-specific data;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Describe the topic-related needs of different members of public user groups or the use of the key products to address different topic-related issues;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Select a specific user group for the target study (i.e. <b>Restriction</b>);</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify and evaluate the working principles and applications of (a) different type(s) of the key products to achieve the aim of the topic/task;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Critically review the strengths and limitations of the key products for the targeted user group;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide insights into possible improvement of the products of the target study.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>✍ Include visuals to assist your discussion, review and evaluation if appropriate.</p>

<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Conclusion</b> (obligatory)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Restate the question or task and the important features of the topic/thesis;</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Summarise the main arguments or the specific evidence you have presented in support of your views;</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> State your overall point of view of the topic/thesis.</p> <p>• <b>In scientific and engineering essays/critiques</b> could have an extra move at the end of this section:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> State your expectations/implications/predictions of the future development of the topic or the area of the study.</p> <p>⚡ Avoid introducing new ideas which have not been discussed in the <b>Main body</b>.</p> <p>⚡ Technical or sophisticated terms can be used in this section as long as they have been introduced in previous sections.</p> <p>⚡ Do not neglect the importance of this final section. Keep an eye on the word count as you write, and leave enough word-space for this section. A weak <b>Conclusion</b> could lead to a loss of language/content marks and lower the overall quality of your writing.</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>References / Bibliography / Literature cited</b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Include all the references referred to or cited in the text from reliable sources, such as journal articles, books and well-recognised websites, strictly following the required and appropriate style and format. Alphabetically or in numbered format based on the style required.</p>

Key: ⚡ indicates a tip for structuring the sections of an essay or a critique; ⚡ indicates a reminder of possible action to enhance the writing quality and readability of an essay or a critique.

### 3. Using appropriate language conventions for essays and critiques

Have you used appropriate language conventions for your essay or critique?

#### ***Demonstrating objectivity by using impersonal language***

- Avoid first- and second-personal pronouns 'I/me/one, you', and 'we/us', unless your subject lecturer allows it, or it is stated clearly as acceptable in the assignment guidelines or department handbook. The frequency of the use of the first-person pronoun 'I' in essays and critiques ranks from Philosophy at the high end, through English, Linguistics, Classics, Economics, Sociology, Law, Business, History and Engineering to Biological Sciences at the low end.
- Use the passive instead of active voice, in order to focus on the action but not the actor who performed the action. It is better to maintain a good distribution and a reasonable number of passive constructions, so as to avoid distracting your readers.

- Use structures like ‘It is...’, ‘There is/are...’ to introduce sentences, using the appropriate tense;
- Use structures like ‘This (NOUN) is...’ or ‘These (NOUN) are...’ for more specific points with a clear reference to the noun phrases appearing in the previous statements. The appropriate tense should be used.
- Change the verb in the sentence into a noun, and then rephrase the sentence.

***Using appropriate verb tense and form***

Functions/Moves	Suggested tense/form
<input type="checkbox"/> Describing procedures and techniques of the study (for <b>scientific and technical writings</b> )	Past tense
<input type="checkbox"/> Describing data, theories or results of both the author’s and other scholars’ studies	
<input type="checkbox"/> Describing established knowledge and theories, or existing situations	Present tense
<input type="checkbox"/> Describing illustrations	
<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewing and evaluating the aspects of the topic	
<input type="checkbox"/> Defining professional and major terms	
<input type="checkbox"/> Describing theoretical background and technical features	
<input type="checkbox"/> Describing morphological geological and geographical features (for <b>scientific-style and technical writing</b> )	
<input type="checkbox"/> Reporting results or figures	
<input type="checkbox"/> Restating the task of the topic in the Conclusion	
<input type="checkbox"/> Describing future events or in the Material and Methods section (for <b>scientific-style and technical writing</b> )	Future tense
<input type="checkbox"/> Providing a context for later discussion	
<input type="checkbox"/> Addressing the writing plan in the Introduction	
<input type="checkbox"/> Explaining the applications or functions of topic-related entities	
<input type="checkbox"/> Predicting the future development of the topic or topic-related entity	
<input type="checkbox"/> Making recommendations	Conditional and subjunctive forms
<input type="checkbox"/> Expressing a condition	Conditional form
<input type="checkbox"/> Stating procedures or a set of instructions (for <b>scientific and technical writing</b> )	Imperative form

***Using appropriate vocabulary***

***Hedging and using assertive language***

(For details, refer to the *Genre guide to academic essays and critiques*)

#### **4. Ensuring appropriate academic style in essays and critiques**

Have you considered the following suggestions to ensure appropriate academic style in your essay or critique writing?

- ❑ Consider your readers as laymen and avoid jargon and specialist terms - provide readers with clear information and explanation for technical or disciplinary terms or aspects in your writing.
- ❑ Use formal language with consideration of subject and disciplinary conventions - avoid contractions of verbs and nouns; do not overuse first- and second-person pronouns, unless reflective writing components are involved, and your subject lecturer allows.
- ❑ Avoid gender-specific language - for example, replace pronouns 'S/he, her, his' with the plural pronoun 'They' or 'We, you, your' depending on the subject and disciplinary style and conventions.
- ❑ Use punctuation carefully - do not use exclamation marks and rhetorical questions.
- ❑ Keep sentences short and digestible - aim for an average 20 to 25 words per sentence.
- ❑ Avoid very long paragraphs - as a general rule: one main idea per sentence; one theme per paragraph, start a new one if there is a natural break in your writing; the first sentence of a paragraph is known as the topic sentence, and introduces the theme of the paragraph.