

Tips for writing a critical essay

	Do	Don't
Reliable argument	DO Start from a reliable premise (e.g. smoking has been shown to cause heart disease and lung cancer) and arrive at a reliable conclusion (therefore it is reasonable to say that smoking is a health hazard)	DON'T Construct a faulty argument on the basis of a weak premise, e.g. There is a strong correlation between people's shoe size and the size of their vocabulary. Therefore having a large vocabulary causes your feet to grow.
Objectivity	DO Be sceptical of statements of fact, unsubstantiated comments, unbalanced arguments, bias, anecdotal evidence, and unreliable sources	DON'T Agree with or accept information, argument, theory or the beliefs of others without questioning, just because they seem like authorities – i.e. have published their written work.
Reasoned argument	DO Develop your argument to reflect your actual findings and reading	DON'T Decide what you think first and then twist the facts or refer to texts selectively to make them fit your claims.
Organisation	DO Present your arguments logically	DON'T Muddle everything together
Convincing argument	DO Analyse and discuss issues, looking at pros and cons, strengths and weaknesses, patterns and trends, connections and complexities, and aim to propose a convincing theory with some input of your own, derived from your research	DON'T Make unproven assumptions and generalisations, especially from anecdotal evidence or personal experience alone

	Do	Don't
Using judgement	DO Challenge and/or reject others' theories if: a) you find them unconvincing and b) you can justify your response in scholarly terms, i.e. your objections are formed from your research	DON'T reject and refute others' work just because you don't agree with it
Acknowledging limitations	DO Account for weaknesses in your own argument, rather than leaving them for your reader to criticise – this will undermine your credibility, whereas pointing up your own faults will show thoroughness, and filling in the gaps will help convince	DON'T Ignore or overlook faulty logic in your own or others' work
Recommendations	DO Make recommendations according to the results of your study and your findings	DON'T Moralise or preach, rant, or tell people what you think they should do. DON'T allow emotions and/or personal views and opinions to cloud your argument

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