
Melbourne Business School Library



Critical thinking & analysis guide

Compilation date: September 2008

The resources in this guide have been compiled by the McLennan Library staff to introduce you to the processes of critical thinking and analysis, and to assist you in developing necessary skills for academic research and writing.

As you begin to research and write an academic assignment, the first thing you need to consider is **what do lecturers look for in a critical analysis?**

'.....many students seem unclear about the possible meanings and expectations when their lecturers set questions which ask them to "critically argue", "critically discuss" etc.....' (James et.al., 1998)

'..... In an exercise in which students are meant to analyse their syndicate group's process and functioning, 10% of students write me long descriptions with very low analytical content. Similarly, in a group exercise in which students are meant to analyse the functioning of an organisation, I occasionally get either a description or set of observations coupled to some recommendations, with the intervening steps missing.....' (MBA Lecturer)

Critical analysis is the synthesis of data and theory to construct a causal argument about a problem. Some of the **key things** that lecturers look for in a critical analysis assignment are:

- depth of insight into the topic,
- independent thinking, and
- a well-organized, well reasoned, clearly written report.

Selected texts from the library collection

You may wish to consult the following books before you start writing your assignment:

Allen, Matthew (2004). **Smart thinking : skills for critical understanding and writing**. South Melbourne, Victoria : Oxford University Press.

MBS 808.0427 ALLE [2004]

"This second edition is a practical step-by-step guide to improving skills in analysis, critical thinking, and the effective communication of arguments and explanations. The text treats reasoning as an aspect of communication and emphasises how to develop arguments that are coherent and that take account of their audience and context." Source: <http://www.seekbooks.com.au>

Becker, Howard (1998). **Tricks of the trade: how to think about your research while you're doing it.** Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
MBS 300.72 BECK

"Drawing on more than four decades of experience as a researcher and teacher, Howard Becker brings students and researchers the many valuable techniques he has learned. His text will help students think about research projects. Assisted by Becker's sound advice, students will be able to make better sense of their research and simultaneously generate fresh ideas on where to look next for new data." – BOOK JACKET

Brink-Budgen, Roy van den (2000). **Critical thinking for students: learn the skills of critical assessment and effective argument.** Oxford: How to Books.
MBS 168.024375 BRIN

"This totally revised and updated book is a must if you want to find out how to develop your own arguments and evaluate other people's arguments. Specifically, you will need to look at other's assumptions and their use of evidence. Learn too how to spot, and rectify, weaknesses of your own." – BOOK JACKET

De Bono, Edward (1990). **Edward de Bono's masterthinker's handbook : a guide to innovative thinking.** London, England : Penguin.
MBS Mt Eliza 153.42 DEBO [1990]

De Bono, Edward (1996). **Teach yourself to think.** Ringwood, Vic. : Penguin Books.
MBS 153.42 DEBO [1996]

Germov, John (1999). **Get great information fast.** St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin.
MBS 025.04 GERM

"Whether you are doing research for an essay or report, or gathering data for a project or presentation, you need to be able to put your hands on good information quickly. In a practical and user friendly manner this text explains how to : decide what information you really need; find a path through the information maze of the Internet, libraries and journals; make the most of your research time; and organise, evaluate and present the information you find." – BOOK JACKET

Gilovich, Thomas (ed.) (2002). **Heuristics and biases : the psychology of intuitive judgment.** Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
MBS 153.4 HEUR [2002]

Greetham, Bryan (2001). **How to write better essays.** Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave.
MBS 808.042 GREE

"Learn how to analyse the question and break down difficult terms and concepts, brainstorm effectively and generate your own ideas, evaluate and criticise arguments, express your thoughts coherently and develop your own style or writing, plan and structure your essay from introduction to conclusion. Along the way you will not only build upon your writing skills, but you will also learn how to improve research, note-taking, reading, organizational and thinking skills too. With a chapter on exams showing you how to develop your recall skills, this book will be a source of help and inspiration to you throughout your course, enabling you to tackle essays with confidence!" – BOOK JACKET

Hackley, Christopher E. (2003). **Doing research projects in marketing, management and consumer research.** New York, NY: Routledge.
MBS 658.0072 HACK

"Offering many practical examples drawn from existing studies and suggesting new topics for consideration, this book brings together major themes of interpretive research within a practical guide to researching and writing a research project." – BOOK JACKET

James, Bronwyn, et.al. (1998). **Critical analysis – What is it?** 2nd ed. Kingswood, N.S.W.: University of Western Sydney.
MBS 808.042 CRIT

This book provides examples of students' writing, their comments about how they went about producing this writing and their lecturers' comments about that writing.

James, Bronwyn, et.al. (1999). **Unravelling the mysteries of critical thinking.** University of Western Sydney, Nepean.
MBS Video & 1 Booklet

A 30 minute video with accompanying notes. It is designed to help students understand the processes involved in critical thinking and writing.

McClain, Molly (1999). **Schaum's quick guide to writing great essays.** New York: McGraw-Hill.
MBS 808.042 MCCL

Quickly and simply, this guide gives you clear, concise explanations – illustrated by dozens of examples - that show you how to: choose a topic, state a thesis, and construct arguments that work; overcome typical writing obstacles; do effective research; learn by example, from successful sample topics, questions, and thesis statements.

Paul, Richard (2002). **Critical thinking : tools for taking charge of your professional and personal life.** Upper Saddle River, N.J. ; London : Financial Times/Prentice Hall.
MBS Mt Eliza 153.42 PAUL [2002]

"The world gets more complex every day -- and you have to cope with that complexity in every part of your life, personal and professional. This book gives you the practical critical thinking skills you need to take control of your life, help you cope with virtually any situation -- and be more successful in pursuing your ultimate dreams and values. You'll learn how to "take thinking apart" -- both yours, and others -- and assess that thinking for quality. You'll understand all three components of thinking: analysis, evaluation and re-thinking -- and, through "brains-on" exercises, learn new thinking skills you'll use constantly. The skills you'll learn will help you think more clearly, accurately, precisely, deeply, logically, and broadly. The result: you'll be able to solve problems more effectively, make better decisions, avoid manipulation by individuals or the media, recognize pathological thinking when you encounter it, and become more intellectually autonomous and courageous. For everyone who wants to become more effective in their professional and personal lives." – BOOK JACKET

Quinton, Sarah and Smallbone, Teresa (2006). **Postgraduate research in business : a critical guide.** London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE.
MBS 650.0711 QUIN

"This text provides a much-needed critical guide to the thinking and learning skills needed to successfully complete postgraduate research...Quinton and Smallbone detail the 'tools of the trade' – the practical and the intellectual skills – that underpin the study of business and management, from research skills and project planning, to strategies for reading, writing and presentation...student-friendly guide to thinking critically about business and management research..." – BOOK JACKET

Sloan, Julia (2006). **Learning to think strategically.** Boston: Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann.
MBS Mt Eliza 658.4012 SLOA

"Author Julia Sloan presents an up until now unexamined account of the relationship between strategic thinking and the learning process involved – taking learning from the academic to the everyday...asserts that learning is the critical link to strategic thinking. Learning is a "conversation tool" that can transform thinking strategically into a sustainable competitive edge" – BOOK JACKET

Sofa, Frank (2004). **Open your mind : the 7 keys to thinking critically**. Crows Nest, N.S.W. : Allen & Unwin.
MBS Mt Eliza 160 SOFO [2004]

Tamblin, Louise and Ward, Pat (2006). **The smart study guide : psychological techniques for student success**. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
MBS 371.30281 TAMB

“Many people engage in formal study without knowing how to learn effectively. This interactive book provides students with innovative and smart ways of making their study more effective, and shows them how to tailor their study techniques to their own particular learning style and psychological make-up”. – BOOK JACKET

Thomas, Alan (2004). **Research skills for management studies**. London; New York: Routledge.
MBS 658.0072 THOM

“Designed as a comprehensive introduction to the main phases of a research project, this textbook leads students from the very first stage of initiation right through to final publication. It considers the nature of research skills and the fundamental elements of the research process, while also exploring the institutional context in which management research is carried out.” – BOOK JACKET

Thurstun, Jennifer (1997). **Exploring academic English: a workbook for student essay writing**. Sydney: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research.
MBS 808.4 THUR

“This innovative book has been designed to help students write academic essays by focusing on the vocabulary used for essay writing. It introduces various functions of the essay (*such as stating the topic of your writing, reporting the research of others*) and concentrates on a limited number of the most common vocabulary items used for carrying out these functions.” – BOOK JACKET

Williams, Steve W. (2002). **Making better business decisions : understanding and improving critical thinking and problem-solving skills**. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
MBS 658.403 WILL

“This text will help you analyze options more clearly and creatively; reduce decision time; recognize and focus on priority sdecisions and understand why and how others make the decisions they do”. – BOOK JACKET

McLennan Library Bibliographies

In addition to the selective texts listed above, further lists of books on academic research and writing skills are available through the Library. You may wish to consult the bibliographies on:

- Theses, cases & business reports
- Study skills & writing reports

These bibliographies are available at:

<http://mclennan.mbs.edu/classroom/bibliographies.htm>

Library Catalogue

For other resources on academic writing and business reports, you can do a 'subject' search of the library catalogue using the headings listed below:

- Critical thinking
- Management – Research
- Research – Methodology
- Study skills
- Dissertations, academic
- Social sciences – Authorship

You may also wish to use the following search terms related to broader topics:

- Business writing
- Business report writing
- Business presentations
- Report writing
- English language – Business English
- Communication in management

Dewey decimal classification numbers (DDC numbers)

Alternatively, you can browse the Library shelves for books on critical thinking and analysis. The Library organizes its book collection using a specialized number sequence, based on DDC whereby books on a particular topic are grouped together. The following are some of the relevant numbers for research skills and academic writing.

378.17	Active learning Action research
658.0072	Management - Research - Methodology. Industrial management - Research - Methodology. Organizational behavior - Research - Methodology
658.45	Business presentations Communication in management Business communication
808.02 – 808.06	Dissertations, academic – Authorship Research – Methodology Academic writing

McLennan Library Research Assistance Service

Selecting the appropriate source of information will often be the most critical step to an 'A' grade assignment. The Librarians are more than happy to assist you in the identification and evaluation of relevant information sources.

If you are unsure about how to proceed with your assignment, contact us for research strategy advice:
informationsupport@mbs.edu

Beyond MBS

The **Academic Skills Unit** of the University of Melbourne produces a number of guides to provide learning support for students. These guides are available on their web site:

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/asu/resources/index.html>

The **Academic Skills Unit** also runs regular courses on academic writing and research skills. For more information visit their website at: <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/asu/classes/index.html>

Additionally, the **School of Graduate Studies** of the University of Melbourne runs workshops and short courses in critical thinking and academic writing for postgraduate students. For more information visit their website at: http://gsserv.registrar.unimelb.edu.au/prog_services/

Further Tips

- Determine the key issues of the topic.
- Examine the evidence and consider biases of the author.
- Ask questions and challenge whatever information that you are presented with.
- Write what you have to say as clearly and precisely as you can.
- Do not be afraid to shorten the text - it would be better to have 1000 words than 2000 that could be expressed more succinctly.
- Be as objective as possible, avoiding slang and emotionally charged words.
- Have someone proof-read your paper for you for spelling and grammatical errors and for intelligibility.