

Critical Writing Workshop

PGCE August 2021

Est.
1841

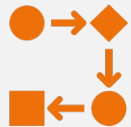
**YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY**



To introduce you to the academic expectations of your PGCE programme and Master's level study.



To support your understanding of writing at Master's level with a focus on criticality.



To support your preparation and transition into your PGCE programme.

Aims



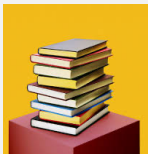
You have already been sent a focused workshop that covers both of these skills.



Please make sure you work through the critical reading PowerPoint before going further with this writing workshop.



Reading and thinking critically are fundamental skills required to begin writing critically and the previous workshop sets the foundations for writing.



Do remember that preliminary reading is crucial but you will continue to read as your writing progresses.



Where you see this symbol, there is a task for you to complete before moving on. These are designed to support your engagement with the content, just as we would do in a face-to-face workshop

Critical Reading and Thinking

Consider the writing process in an academic context.



- Think back to the last time you wrote an academic essay (This may have been some time ago or more recently.)
- How did you approach it?

Did you look at previous feedback?

Did you plan?

When did you do your reading?

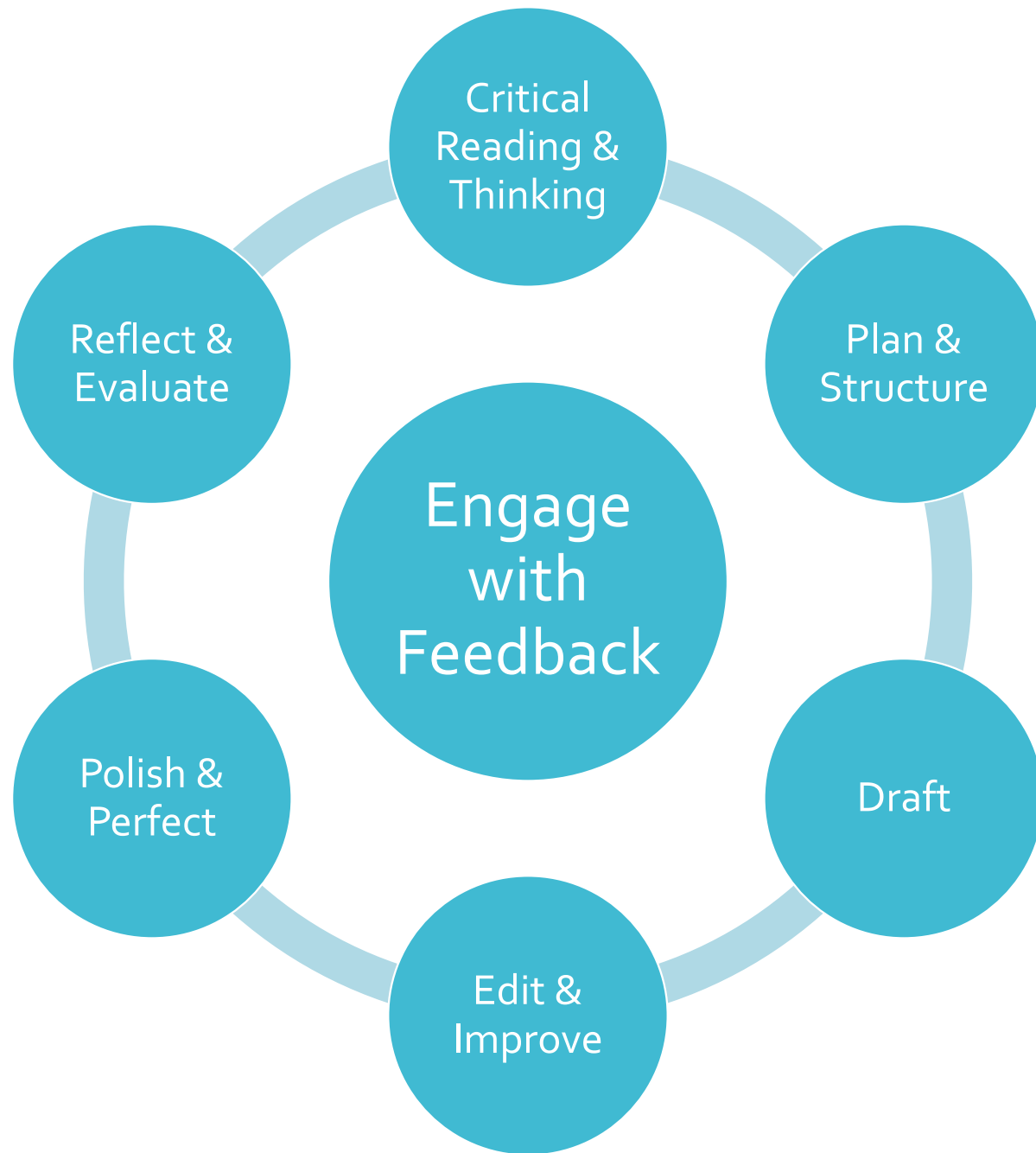
Did you do a draft first?

Did you read through your final submission?

- Draw a diagram of the cycle you went through when you began working on the academic assignment.

Writing is a
complex task.

How does this
compare to
your own
diagram?





Once you have completed your preliminary reading, you are in a position to begin planning.



Planning can take different formats and you should select the appropriate method that matched your purpose for writing and reflects how you work best.



It is better to start large and then refine as your structure becomes clearer.



Consider initial visual approaches to capture your first ideas.



Ensure these ideas are supported by research and wider reading and leave room in your plan to develop the critical discuss that might be informed by further reading.

Plan & Structure

Refining your visual plan

- Once your visual plan is complete, you can begin to consider the best possible structure for your writing.
- The key point to remember is that you are constructing a critical discussion and you can paragraph carefully to make the most of the contrast in viewpoints as well as robust criticisms of the research.
- By paragraphing carefully, you are able to guide the reader/marker through each point. This will bring clarity to your structure and improve your overall writing.
- You may wish to use a paragraph planner here to highlight what each paragraph will discuss. This is helpful if you have not have a significant amount of experience in academic writing.

Example of a paragraph plan

You should refine this plan to meet the purpose of your writing



The image shows a template for an 'Assignment Plan' form. The form is titled 'Assignment Plan' in the top right corner. It is divided into several sections with labels and corresponding colored boxes for notes:

- First draft.....Due on.....** (top left, light brown box)
- Assignment title:** (top left, light green box)
- Introduction notes:** (middle left, light brown box)
- Paragraph.....ideas:** (bottom left, light green box)
- Paragraph.....ideas:** (bottom left, light green box)
- Paragraph.....ideas:** (bottom left, light green box)
- Points to include:** (top right, light orange box)
- Conclusion notes:** (middle right, light brown box)
- To research:** (bottom right, light orange box)

The form is set against a light orange background. In the bottom right corner of the form, there is a logo for 'The Hoppy Planner Company'.

Writing a plan



What better way to deepen your learning than by actively planning a piece of critical writing?

Your title: How useful is assessment in school? (1000 words)

Some reading:

<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/for-schools/free-resources-advice/assessment-hub/introduction-to-assessment/an-introduction-to-formative-and-summative-assessment/>

<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/Images/271179-assessment-for-learning.pdf>

Create a plan for the above assignment title. Try using or adapting the paragraph plan example on the previous slide. This is also available as a download on the website.

Don't write the assignment yet, we will do that later in the workshop.

Please complete this task before moving on.

Criticality

- When writing at Master's level, it is crucial that you inject criticality into your writing.
- The concept of criticality is highlighted in our previous workshop on critical thinking & reading, so it is important to work through this workshop.
- In essence, a critical approach in your writing must highlight the robustness of your reading and thinking. You must demonstrate that you have read widely and be in a position where you can offer contrasting opinions about your topic. You must also consider the reliability of any research read and offer criticism of the findings if the research methodology is not secure. You must also consider the place of researcher positionality and bias.

Draft

- Once you have completed your visual plan and have an understanding of your initial structure, you can begin to draft your first attempt.
- At this stage, consider the logical development of ideas and the sequence of your critical discussion.
- Your paragraph plan should help you to focus each point you wish to make.
- It is easy to deviate from your question at this stage. The more focused you can be at this stage, the less you will need to edit and improve.
- Begin your first draft early. This will allow more time for edit and improve your writing.
- Ensure you reference your wider reading at this time.

Sentence Structure

- It is important that your writing is concise and clear.
- Many students think that academic style/tone equals complex language use, but it is quite the opposite.
- Good academic style ensures that your writing is easily understood by the reader and is always grammatically correct.
- To support this, it is better to limit the number of clauses used in the same sentence and always orally rehearse your sentences before writing.
- Say the sentence out loud if you have to and self-edit before you write.
- This will bring greater clarity to your writing and ensure the reader fully understands the point you are making.

Punctuation

- Punctuation can be tricky – especially if your first degree did not involve a lot of formal writing.
- People often struggle with commas and will incorrectly use a comma in the place of a full stop (known as a comma splice).
- To avoid this, remember that a sentence is a grammatically correct and fully formed idea that must include the subject and a verb, e.g. **The child (subject) read (verb)**
- Now look at this sentence:

The child was an avid reader, they particularly enjoyed fiction.

This is an incorrect use of the comma because these are two separate sentences (ideas).

The child (subject) was (verb) an avid reader, they (subject) particularly enjoyed (verb) fiction.

To correct this you could:

- swap the comma for a full stop
 - swap the comma for a conjunction, e.g. and
 - swap the comma for a semicolon
-
- Remember to orally rehearse your sentences as this will help.

Writing your first draft

- You should now have completed your plan and done some reading around the title.
- So now it's time to write your **draft** critical reflection

How useful is assessment in school?

(1000 words)

- Remember : criticality
sentence structure
punctuation



Edit and Improve

Once you have your first draft completed, you can continue to edit your written work to make improvements.

Things to consider:

1. Is the structure sensible and progressive?
2. Am I signposting the reader between paragraphs? (making links and hinting to the reader what is coming next)
3. Is my sentence structure clear enough and do all of my sentences make grammatical sense?
4. Have I injected a sense of criticality? Is there contrast within the discussion? Have I identified criticism of the research?
5. Is my introduction and conclusion clear and focused on the question?
6. Have I stayed on focus/topic throughout?
7. Have you referenced consistently?



Polish & Perfect

Once you have a version of your writing you are happy with, you need to perfect any errors and check for consistency.

Make sure you fully engage with the following at this time:

1. Check referencing. Make sure you have allowed academic conventions and you have stuck to university guidance. We use HARVARD referencing. You can find this here: <https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/students/referencing/>
2. Proofread carefully to check for typos or spelling errors
3. Check punctuation. Pay close attention to commas and apostrophes
4. Check your language use – is it academic in tone?
5. Does your writing follow academic conventions for presentation?

Reflect & Evaluate

- This is the final element of the writing process and is often neglected.
- It is important to reflect on your completed piece of work. Consider what you are happy with and what you still need to develop.
- Prioritise your developmental areas and ask for support if you feel this will help.
- Once you have received feedback, reflect on this and feed forward.
- Consider the significance of any academic targets that you have been set and try to work on these before your next submission. BE PROACTIVE.

You will be asked to bring this task to a session during the first two weeks of the programme to support you with your writing.

It will then be submitted for formative feedback.

Further Guidance & Reading

Academic writing

<https://www.yorks.ac.uk/students/study-skills/academic-writing/>

Study skills

<https://www.yorks.ac.uk/students/study-skills/>

Reading

[Master's Level Study in Education – A guide to success for PGCE students](#)

[Doing your PGCE at M-Level](#)