

# Critical Analysis Checklist: Complete Guide

A systematic approach to critical analysis from initial reading through final revision.

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## PHASE 1: PRE-WRITING CRITICAL READING

### First Reading: Understanding the Text

- ☐ What is the main argument or purpose of this text?
- ☐ Who is the intended audience?
- ☐ What is the context (historical, cultural, social)?
- ☐ What genre or format is this, and why does that matter?
- ☐ What are my initial reactions and assumptions?

### Second Reading: Analyzing Components

**Structure & Organization** - [ ] How is the text organized? What's the significance of this structure? - [ ] What patterns emerge in how information is presented? - [ ] Are there clear transitions between ideas? What do they reveal?

**Author's Techniques** - [ ] What rhetorical strategies does the author use (ethos, pathos, logos)? - [ ] What literary devices or stylistic choices appear? (imagery, metaphor, tone, diction) - [ ] How does the author establish credibility or authority? - [ ] What assumptions does the author make about the audience?

**Content Analysis** - [ ] What are the key claims or arguments? - [ ] What evidence supports each claim? - [ ] What counterarguments are acknowledged or ignored? - [ ] What is left unsaid or implied? - [ ] What biases might be present?

### Third Reading: Critical Evaluation

- ☐ What are the strengths of this text's argument or presentation?
- ☐ What are the weaknesses or gaps?
- ☐ What questions remain unanswered?
- ☐ How does this text relate to other works or ideas I know?
- ☐ What larger significance or implications does this have?

### Annotation Strategy

- ☐ Underline or highlight key passages
  - ☐ Write marginal notes with questions and observations
  - ☐ Mark patterns with symbols or color coding
  - ☐ Note page numbers for potential evidence
  - ☐ Flag confusing sections that need clarification
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## PHASE 2: EVIDENCE EVALUATION CRITERIA

### Quality Assessment Checklist

**Relevance (Does it fit?)** - [ ] Directly supports my specific analytical claim - [ ] Connects clearly to my thesis statement - [ ] Fits logically within the paragraph's focus - [ ] Adds new insight rather than repeating previous evidence

**Credibility (Can I trust it?)** - ☐ Comes from a reliable, authoritative source - ☐  
Represents the original text accurately (not taken out of context) - ☐ Is recent enough to  
be valid (for time-sensitive topics) - ☐ Is verifiable through citation information

**Strength (How convincing is it?)** - ☐ Provides concrete, specific details rather than  
vague generalizations - ☐ Offers quantifiable data or precise examples when appropriate - ☐  
☐ Demonstrates clear cause-effect relationships or patterns - ☐ Is representative rather  
than an outlier or exception

**Integration (How well does it work?)** - ☐ Is properly introduced with context - ☐  
Includes accurate citation information - ☐ Is followed by substantial analysis (2-3  
sentences minimum) - ☐ Connects to the broader argument, not just isolated

### Evidence Red Flags to Avoid

- **Too vague:** “The author makes many good points” ✓ **Specific:** “In paragraph 4, the author uses statistical data showing a 40% increase”
- **Out of context:** Using a quote that means something different in the original ✓  
**Contextualized:** Explaining the surrounding argument before quoting
- **Over-reliance:** Using 5+ quotes from the same page or source ✓ **Varied:** Drawing from multiple sections to show patterns
- **Insufficient:** Quote without any analysis following it ✓ **Analyzed:** Each piece of evidence gets 2-3 sentences of explanation

### Source Evaluation for Research-Based Analysis

**Primary vs. Secondary Sources** - ☐ Have I identified whether this is primary or secondary? - ☐ Am I using the appropriate source type for my purpose? - ☐ Do I understand the difference in how each should be cited?

**Authority Check** - ☐ Who is the author? What are their credentials? - ☐ Is this published by a reputable outlet? - ☐ Has this been peer-reviewed or fact-checked? - ☐ Are there potential conflicts of interest?

**Currency Check** - ☐ When was this published? - ☐ Is the information still current and relevant? - ☐ Have there been significant developments since publication?

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## PHASE 3: LOGICAL FALLACY IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

### Common Fallacies in Arguments

**Ad Hominem (Attacking the Person)** - Definition: Attacking the character of the person making an argument rather than addressing the argument itself - Example: “You can’t trust his economic analysis because he’s a terrible father” - Check: Does this critique address the person rather than their reasoning?

**Straw Man** - Definition: Misrepresenting someone’s argument to make it easier to attack - Example: “She wants environmental regulations, so she must hate all businesses” - Check: Am I accurately representing the opposing position?

**False Dilemma (Either/Or)** - Definition: Presenting only two options when more exist - Example: “Either we ban all social media or accept mental health decline” - Check: Are there other possibilities being ignored?

**Slippery Slope** - Definition: Claiming that one event will inevitably lead to extreme consequences - Example: “If we allow students to retake tests, soon they’ll expect to retake entire semesters” - Check: Is each step in this chain of events truly inevitable?

**Appeal to Authority (Inappropriate)** - Definition: Citing an authority figure outside their area of expertise - Example: "This famous actor says vaccines are dangerous, so they must be" - Check: Is this person actually an expert in the relevant field?

**Hasty Generalization** - Definition: Drawing broad conclusions from insufficient evidence - Example: "I met two rude people from that city, so everyone there must be rude" - Check: Is my sample size large enough to support this claim?

**Post Hoc (False Cause)** - Definition: Assuming that because B followed A, A must have caused B - Example: "Crime dropped after the mayor was elected, so the mayor reduced crime" - Check: Could there be other explanations? Is correlation being confused with causation?

**Appeal to Emotion** - Definition: Manipulating emotions rather than using logic - Example: "Think of the children!" without explaining how a policy actually affects them - Check: Is this argument based on evidence or just emotional manipulation?

**Circular Reasoning (Begging the Question)** - Definition: Using the conclusion as one of the premises - Example: "This text is the best because it's better than all the others" - Check: Does my reasoning actually prove anything or just restate my claim?

**Red Herring** - Definition: Introducing irrelevant information to distract from the main argument - Example: When discussing climate policy, suddenly shifting to talk about political scandals - Check: Does this point actually relate to the argument being made?

**Bandwagon Appeal** - Definition: Arguing something is true because many people believe it - Example: "Everyone thinks this book is great, so it must be a masterpiece" - Check: Is popularity being substituted for actual evidence?

**False Equivalence** - Definition: Treating two things as equally important when they're not - Example: "Both protesters and violent rioters broke the law, so they're the same" - Check: Are these situations truly comparable in scale and severity?

### Fallacy Detection Checklist

**In the Text You're Analyzing** - ☐ What is the main argument? Is it logically sound? - ☐ What evidence is provided? Is it sufficient and relevant? - ☐ Are cause-effect relationships clearly demonstrated? - ☐ Are there unsupported leaps in logic? - ☐ Does the author oversimplify complex issues? - ☐ Are counterarguments fairly represented? - ☐ Is emotional language used to compensate for weak reasoning?

**In Your Own Analysis** - ☐ Am I fairly representing the original argument? - ☐ Am I making claims I can actually support? - ☐ Am I confusing correlation with causation? - ☐ Am I considering alternative interpretations? - ☐ Am I using emotional language inappropriately? - ☐ Are my conclusions proportional to my evidence?

## PHASE 4: THESIS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHEET

### Step 1: Identify Your Analytical Focus

What aspect of the text are you analyzing? - ☐ Author's argument and effectiveness - ☐ Literary techniques and their effects - ☐ Rhetorical strategies and audience impact - ☐ Themes and their development - ☐ Character development or motivations - ☐ Structural choices and their significance - ☐ Cultural or historical context and meaning

My focus: \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 2: Make Preliminary Observations

List 3-5 specific things you noticed: 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_ 5.  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Step 3: Find Patterns or Connections

How do these observations relate to each other?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Step 4: Ask “So What?”

Why does this pattern matter? What’s the larger significance?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Step 5: Draft Your Thesis

**Formula 1: Critical Evaluation** “In [text], [author] uses [technique/strategy] to [effect/purpose], which ultimately [evaluation of effectiveness/significance].”

**Formula 2: Interpretive Claim** “Although [common interpretation], a closer examination of [text] reveals that [your interpretation], as evidenced by [key element].”

**Formula 3: Comparative Analysis** “While [text A] employs [approach] to [effect], [text B] uses [different approach] to achieve [similar/different effect], demonstrating [insight].”

**Formula 4: Contextual Analysis** “[Text’s] use of [element] must be understood within the context of [historical/cultural context], which reveals [deeper meaning].”

My draft thesis: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Step 6: Thesis Quality Check

**Specificity** - ☐ Names the specific text(s) and author(s) - ☐ Identifies specific techniques, strategies, or elements - ☐ Makes a precise claim rather than a vague statement

**Arguability** - ☐ States an interpretation that could be debated - ☐ Goes beyond obvious observations - ☐ Requires evidence and analysis to prove

**Complexity** - ☐ Acknowledges nuance rather than oversimplifying - ☐ Shows relationships between multiple elements - ☐ Demonstrates sophisticated understanding

**Clarity** - ☐ Can be understood in one reading - ☐ Uses precise academic language - ☐ Avoids vague words like “interesting” or “important”

**Scope** - ☐ Is neither too broad nor too narrow for the essay length - ☐ Can be adequately supported within the word count - ☐ Focuses on analysis rather than just summary

### Step 7: Revision

#### Common Thesis Weaknesses and Fixes

○ **Too broad:** “Shakespeare’s Hamlet is about revenge.” ✓ **Specific:** “In Hamlet, Shakespeare uses the protagonist’s hesitation and intellectual pondering to critique the destructive nature of revenge, suggesting that thoughtful inaction may be as damaging as rash violence.”

○ **Just summary:** “The author discusses the effects of social media on teenagers.” ✓ **Analytical:** “Through carefully selected anecdotal evidence and strategic appeals to parental anxiety, the author constructs a one-sided argument that overlooks the potential benefits of social media for adolescent identity development.”

- **Vague evaluation:** “The author makes many good points about climate change.” ✓
- Precise evaluation:** “While the author’s use of scientific data effectively establishes the urgency of climate change, the essay’s emotional appeals and doomsday rhetoric may alienate skeptical readers who would otherwise be receptive to policy solutions.”

My revised thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

## PHASE 5: DRAFT REVISION CHECKLIST

### DRAFT 1: Structure and Argument

**Overall Organization** (Review Time: 20-30 minutes) - ☐ Introduction clearly establishes context and thesis - ☐ Each body paragraph has one clear focus - ☐ Paragraphs follow a logical progression - ☐ Evidence is distributed evenly throughout - ☐ Conclusion synthesizes without just repeating

**Thesis and Focus** - ☐ Thesis appears in introduction (usually last sentence) - ☐ Thesis is specific and arguable - ☐ Every paragraph clearly connects to the thesis - ☐ No paragraph strays from the main argument

**Topic Sentences** - ☐ Each body paragraph starts with a clear topic sentence - ☐ Topic sentences make mini-arguments, not just announce topics - ☐ Topic sentences connect back to the thesis - ☐ Reading only the topic sentences tells a coherent story

**Evidence Distribution** - ☐ Each claim is supported by specific evidence - ☐ Evidence is spread throughout, not bunched in one section - ☐ No paragraph is more than 50% quotation - ☐ Sources are varied (if research-based)

**Transitions** - ☐ Clear transitions between paragraphs - ☐ Transitions show logical relationships (cause-effect, contrast, continuation) - ☐ Transitions move the argument forward

Major Issues Found: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority Fixes for Draft 2: 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### DRAFT 2: Paragraph Development and Analysis

**Evidence Integration** (Review Time: 30-45 minutes) - ☐ Every quote/example is introduced with context - ☐ Citations are formatted correctly and complete - ☐ Quotes are integrated grammatically into sentences - ☐ Evidence is relevant and sufficient for each claim

**Analysis Depth** - ☐ Each piece of evidence is followed by 2-3 sentences of analysis - ☐ Analysis explains HOW evidence supports the claim, not just THAT it does - ☐ Analysis makes connections to the broader thesis - ☐ No “quote dumping” (evidence without explanation)

**Critical Thinking** - ☐ Analysis goes beyond surface-level observations - ☐ Multiple interpretations are considered where appropriate - ☐ Connections are drawn between different pieces of evidence - ☐ Implications and significance are explained

**Paragraph Balance** - ☐ Paragraphs are 6-10 sentences (150-250 words typically) - ☐ No paragraph is just one or two sentences - ☐ Each paragraph has: topic sentence → evidence → analysis → connection - ☐ Paragraphs are roughly similar in length

**Counterarguments** - ☐ Alternative interpretations are acknowledged - ☐ Counterarguments are addressed fairly - ☐ Rebuttals strengthen the main argument

**Paragraph-Level Issues:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Priority Fixes for Draft 3:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### DRAFT 3: Sentence-Level Clarity and Style

**Sentence Variety** (Review Time: 30-40 minutes) - ☐ Mix of simple, compound, and complex sentences - ☐ Sentences vary in length (aim for average of 15-20 words) - ☐ No more than 2-3 sentences in a row with the same structure - ☐ Opening words/phrases vary

**Clarity and Precision** - ☐ Every sentence has a clear subject and verb - ☐ Vague pronouns are replaced with specific nouns - ☐ Wordy phrases are tightened (“due to the fact that” → “because”) - ☐ Academic vocabulary is used correctly - ☐ No unnecessary jargon or overcomplicated language

**Word Choice** - ☐ Verbs are strong and specific (avoid “is,” “has,” “makes”) - ☐ Adjectives and adverbs are purposeful, not excessive - ☐ Repetitive words are replaced with synonyms - ☐ Precise vocabulary replaces vague terms

**Voice and Tone** - ☐ Consistent formal academic tone throughout - ☐ No informal language (contractions, slang, colloquialisms) - ☐ Confident assertions (“The author demonstrates” not “seems to maybe show”) - ☐ First person used sparingly and appropriately

**Grammar and Mechanics** - ☐ Subject-verb agreement in all sentences - ☐ Proper comma usage (especially with introductory phrases and clauses) - ☐ No run-on sentences or fragments - ☐ Proper use of semicolons and colons - ☐ Apostrophes used correctly

**Common Errors to Find** - ☐ Its/it’s confusion - ☐ Their/there/they’re confusion - ☐ Affect/effect confusion - ☐ Your/you’re confusion - ☐ Comma splices - ☐ Misplaced modifiers

**Sentence-Level Issues:** \_\_\_\_\_

### DRAFT 4: Final Polish

**Introduction and Conclusion** (Review Time: 20 minutes) - ☐ Hook captures attention without being gimmicky - ☐ Context is sufficient but not excessive - ☐ Thesis is clear, specific, and sophisticated - ☐ Conclusion synthesizes rather than summarizes - ☐ Conclusion addresses the “so what?” question - ☐ Final sentence provides closure without being abrupt

**Formatting and Citations** - ☐ Proper formatting for the required style (MLA, APA, Chicago) - ☐ All sources cited correctly in-text - ☐ Works Cited/References page is complete and formatted - ☐ Title is centered and not underlined/quoted - ☐ Header with name, date, etc. is correct - ☐ Page numbers included - ☐ Proper margins and spacing

**Read-Aloud Check** - ☐ Read the entire essay aloud (or use text-to-speech) - ☐ Mark any places where you stumble - ☐ Note any awkward phrasing - ☐ Listen for repetitive sentence structures - ☐ Check that the essay flows smoothly

**Final Proofreading** - ☐ Print out the essay (errors are easier to spot on paper) - ☐ Read backward sentence by sentence to catch typos - ☐ Check that all paragraph breaks are intentional - ☐ Verify that all quotation marks and parentheses are closed - ☐ Run spell-check but don’t rely on it exclusively

**Final Check:** - ☐ Essay meets length requirements - ☐ All assignment requirements addressed - ☐ File is named correctly for submission - ☐ File is in the correct format (usually .doc or .pdf)



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## PHASE 6: SELF-ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Rate yourself honestly on each criterion (1-4 scale)

1 = Needs Significant Improvement | 2 = Developing | 3 = Proficient | 4 = Exemplary

### ARGUMENT & THESIS (Weight: 25%)

**Thesis Quality** [1] [2] [3] [4] - **4:** Sophisticated, specific, arguable thesis that demonstrates complex understanding - **3:** Clear, specific thesis that makes an arguable claim - **2:** Thesis is present but too broad, vague, or obvious - **1:** Thesis is missing, unclear, or not arguable

**Argument Development** [1] [2] [3] [4] - **4:** Compelling, logical progression of ideas with sophisticated connections - **3:** Clear, logical organization with effective connections between ideas - **2:** Organization is present but transitions or logic are weak - **1:** Disorganized or illogical progression of ideas

My score: /8 / Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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### EVIDENCE & SUPPORT (Weight: 25%)

**Evidence Quality** [1] [2] [3] [4] - **4:** Highly relevant, credible, and sufficient evidence from varied sources - **3:** Relevant and credible evidence that adequately supports claims - **2:** Some evidence present but insufficient, irrelevant, or poorly chosen - **1:** Little to no evidence, or evidence is unreliable

**Integration** [1] [2] [3] [4] - **4:** Evidence seamlessly integrated with proper context and perfect citations - **3:** Evidence properly introduced and cited with adequate context - **2:** Evidence included but poorly introduced or citation errors present - **1:** Evidence dropped in without context or citations missing

My score: /8 / Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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### ANALYSIS & CRITICAL THINKING (Weight: 30%)

**Analysis Depth** [1] [2] [3] [4] - **4:** Insightful, sophisticated analysis that reveals deeper meanings - **3:** Clear, thorough analysis that explains significance of evidence - **2:** Analysis present but superficial or too brief - **1:** Little to no analysis; mostly summary

**Critical Engagement** [1] [2] [3] [4] - **4:** Examines complexities, considers alternatives, evaluates effectively - **3:** Shows critical thinking by questioning and evaluating claims - **2:** Some critical thinking but mostly accepts ideas at face value - **1:** No critical engagement; purely descriptive

**Connection to Thesis** [1] [2] [3] [4] - **4:** Every point clearly advances the thesis with sophisticated connections - **3:** Analysis consistently connects back to the main argument - **2:** Some connections to thesis but not always clear - **1:** Analysis doesn't connect to thesis or strays off topic

My score: /12 / Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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### ORGANIZATION & STRUCTURE (Weight: 10%)

**Structure** [1] [2] [3] [4] - **4:** Sophisticated organization that enhances the argument - **3:** Clear organization with effective topic sentences and transitions - **2:** Basic organization but weak transitions or topic sentences - **1:** Poor organization that confuses the reader

**Paragraph Development** [1] [2] [3] [4] - **4:** Paragraphs are focused, well-developed, and balanced - **3:** Paragraphs have clear focus and adequate development - **2:** Paragraphs present but underdeveloped or unfocused - **1:** Paragraphs lack focus or development

**My score:** /8 / **Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_

## STYLE & MECHANICS (Weight: 10%)

**Sentence Style** [1] [2] [3] [4] - **4:** Varied, sophisticated sentences that enhance clarity and flow - **3:** Clear, varied sentences with few awkward constructions - **2:** Sentences are understandable but lack variety or have some awkward moments - **1:** Frequent awkward or unclear sentences

**Grammar & Mechanics** [1] [2] [3] [4] - **4:** Virtually error-free; any errors don't impede understanding - **3:** Few errors that don't significantly affect clarity - **2:** Several errors that occasionally impede understanding - **1:** Frequent errors that significantly impede understanding

**Word Choice** [1] [2] [3] [4] - **4:** Precise, sophisticated vocabulary used effectively - **3:** Appropriate academic vocabulary used correctly - **2:** Generally appropriate vocabulary with occasional imprecision - **1:** Vague, inappropriate, or incorrectly used vocabulary

**My score:** /12 / **Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_

## TOTAL SCORE CALCULATION

Category	My Score	Weight	Weighted Score
Argument & Thesis	___/8	× 3.125	= ___
Evidence & Support	___/8	× 3.125	= ___
Analysis & Critical Thinking	___/12	× 2.5	= ___
Organization & Structure	___/8	× 1.25	= ___
Style & Mechanics	___/12	× 0.833	= ___
<b>TOTAL</b>		**	___/100**

## REFLECTION & ACTION PLAN

**My biggest strengths in this essay:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas that need the most improvement:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_

**Specific goals for my next essay:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions to ask my teacher/tutor:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

## GRADE ESTIMATION GUIDE

- **90-100 (A):** Exemplary work with sophisticated analysis, strong evidence, and minimal errors
- **80-89 (B):** Proficient work with clear analysis, adequate support, and few significant errors
- **70-79 (C):** Developing work with some analysis but noticeable gaps in support or organization
- **60-69 (D):** Work shows effort but significant weaknesses in multiple areas



**Below 60 (F):** Work does not meet basic requirements

My estimated grade: \_\_\_\_

Is this realistic compared to my previous work? \_\_\_\_

## QUICK REFERENCE: REVISION PRIORITIES

If you're short on time, focus on these high-impact revisions:

1. **Strengthen your thesis** (5-10 min) - Make it specific and arguable
2. **Add analysis after evidence** (15-20 min) - Never leave a quote unexplained
3. **Fix topic sentences** (10-15 min) - Make them clear mini-arguments
4. **Read aloud for clarity** (10-15 min) - Catch awkward phrasing
5. **Proofread for major errors** (10 min) - Focus on sentence boundaries and agreement

**Total minimum revision time:** 50-70 minutes

## PROGRESS TRACKER

**Date Started:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Due Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Pre-writing critical reading complete  
Evidence collected and evaluated  
Logical fallacies checked  
Thesis developed and refined  
Draft 1 complete (Structure)  
Draft 2 complete (Analysis)  
Draft 3 complete (Style)  
Draft 4 complete (Polish)  
Self-assessment complete  
Peer review received (optional)  
Final submission ready

**Hours spent on this essay:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Most challenging aspect:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Most satisfying aspect:** \_\_\_\_\_