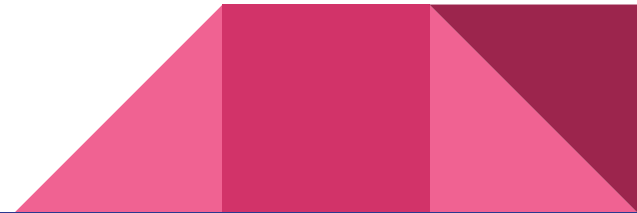



Writing & Critical Analysis in Psychology

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Dr Paraskevi Argyriou

Menti: what year are you in?



Plan for today

- Clarify the essay marking criteria used to assess your work
 - Use & discuss the essay marking criteria to assess a piece of coursework
 - Discriminate between a 2:1 and a First class essay
 - Share some tips before you submit your essay
 - Q&A
- 

Types of essays

- Essay-based exam
- Coursework
- Parts of the PSY600 dissertation



Essay Marking Criteria

ESSAY MARKING CRITERIA

Psychology essay marking criteria

Psychology Marking Criteria and Mark Scheme for Essay-style Questions

Grade	Mark (%)	All Levels			Levels 5 - 6 (Desirable in other years)	Level 6
		Evidence of Comprehension	Breadth and Depth of Knowledge	Irrelevant Material and Errors	Synthesis & Balance	Originality & Innovation
A++	100	Outstanding; deep insight, more than expected at this level.	Outstanding: beyond what could be expected.	Contains no inaccuracies, or irrelevant material. APA formatting conventions strictly adhered to in coursework with no grammatical errors.	Outstanding selection. Beyond what would be expected at undergraduate level.	Original ideas and very insightful.
A+	92	Exceptional knowledge and understanding illustrated via logical, detailed and comprehensive presentation of relevant concepts/theories.	Excellent analysis and coherent evaluative interpretations of principal theories and concepts. Balanced and logical arguments presented together with a coherent and innovative summary/conclusion. Clear and extensive evidence of broad based reading.	Contains no inaccuracies, or irrelevant material. APA formatting conventions strictly adhered to in coursework with no grammatical errors.	Astute selection and juxtaposition, presenting widely evidenced and well evaluated arguments.	Strong evidence of creative interpretation.
A	83	Very good, broad-based knowledge and understanding shown of concepts/ theories and their limitations.	Very good analysis, showing sound insight into the main issues around the research presented. Coherent and relevant critical evaluation via logical arguments and good summary/conclusion.	No irrelevant material or errors. APA formatting conventions strictly adhered to in coursework with no grammatical errors.	Appropriate selection and combination. A logical flow of arguments, supporting/refuting research interpretations.	Very good evidence.
		Very good knowledge and	Good analysis showing a good perception of the main issues		Appropriate selection and	

Evidence of Comprehension

We are looking for:

- Understanding of the question in your own words
- Referencing of relevant sources
- Logical organisation
- Balanced presentation



Breadth and Depth of Knowledge

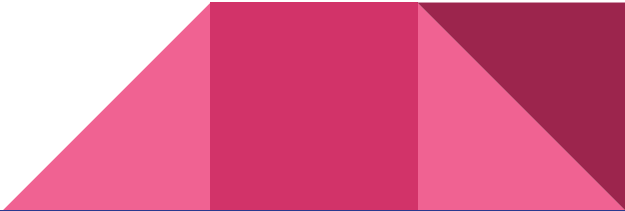
We are looking for:

- Evidence of broad reading
- Analysis rather than description
- Well-rounded critical evaluation
- Evidence of deep understanding




Irrelevant Material and Errors

We are looking for:

- Accurate statements
 - Relevant material directly linked to the question at hand
 - Appropriate language
 - Appropriate referencing (APA 7th)
- 


Synthesis & Balance

We are looking for:

- Critical evaluation
 - Convincing & well balanced arguments that develop logically
 - Relevant empirical evidence and what aspects of a problem or a theory they explain
 - Different perspectives
- 

Originality & Innovation

We are looking for:

- A study we haven't read/taught you
 - An interpretation and/or alternative explanation we haven't thought about
 - A well thought and explained limitation of a study/paper
 - A specific and relevant recommendation for future research
- 

Critical evaluation: Is this good enough?

A paragraph of 'critical evaluation' is included after all the evidence has been presented, highlighting weaknesses in the studies reviewed. The conclusion argues that these problems limit any clear answer to the question and suggests that further research must be carried out.



Critical evaluation: Is this good enough?

As each study is outlined a (single) methodological limitation is highlighted. The conclusion weighs up the evidence reviewed, taking these problems into account. An answer is offered but the need for more research (addressing these weaknesses) is flagged.




Critical evaluation: Is this good enough?

Studies are presented on the basis that each contributes in some way to the answer (i.e. they don't have serious flaws, but their scope is limited) and the value of each study (in terms of answering the question) is highlighted. The conclusion presents a clear answer to the question, clarifying how the evidence presented informs that answer, but also highlighting any gaps as suggestions for future research.



Critical evaluation: Is this good enough?

The theoretical & methodological challenges inherent in the field of research are acknowledged at the outset, with an indication of how they are dealt with. Evidence that is relevant for addressing the question is presented, with an outline of how it has been gathered which highlights any crucial methodological controls (good stuff) and raises well-explained limitations. The conclusion clarifies how, together, the evidence builds to a clear (but not necessarily complete) answer, highlighting what uncertainty remains and suggesting the most appropriate focus for future research (in terms of research questions and/or appropriate methodology)



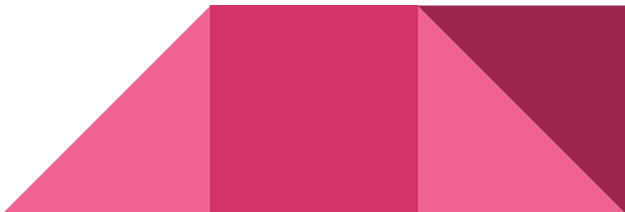
Example essay/homework

What grade did you give this?

Did you notice anything in particular?

The Critical Period Hypothesis: A Critical Mistake?

As many people experience difficulty in learning a foreign language, the critical period for second language acquisition has always been a well-loved subject for discussion, and the academic world is equally divided in their opinions. Johnson and Newport have famously stated that there is a definite moment in time, at 15 years, after which it would be impossible to learn a second language (qtd. in Singleton and Ryan 67). Penfield and Roberts were the first to state that because the brain loses plasticity in puberty, it would become impossible to learn other languages (qtd. in Birdsong 3). However, many researchers have a different opinion on this matter.



Surprise...

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27-05-2012

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Critical evaluation example from Gwen's essay

Main thesis of the essay: *The critical period does not exist for second language acquisition*

Argument: *There are actually many examples found where a perfect command of a second language is achieved after the critical period*

Examples from some studies: *From these studies Bongaerts concluded that "the pronunciation of some of these learners was consistently judged to be native-like [...] by listeners who were native speakers of the language" (154). This is another sign that the critical period hypothesis as it was originally formulated is not valid, as there are several learners in this study who did manage to achieve a near-perfect accent in a second language.*

→ Is this a strong/weak example?



Critical evaluation example from Gwen's essay

Main thesis of the essay: *The critical period does not exist for second language acquisition*

Argument: *Motivation might also play a role in second language learning*

Examples from a study: *Research by Tragant shows that motivation, or the lack thereof, might also explain the results (Muñoz ch. 10). This makes sense: the more someone is motivated to learn a language, whether out of necessity or interest, the more likely they are to put a lot of effort in learning the language and the bigger the chance is they will get a higher command of the second language.*

→ Is this a strong/weak example?



Structure your essay

Introduction

- Set the scene, hook reader's attention
- State your thesis, what will you argue

Main body


- Topic & transition sentences
- Critically analyse the theories & evidence
- Link back to the question at hand

Conclusion

- Draw connections
- What should the reader take home?




What does a 2:1 class essay look like?


- Directly answers the essay question
 - Demonstrates a good understanding
 - NOT just a summary of the literature
 - Goes beyond the reading for the lectures
 - Has a clear structure (introduction, main body, conclusion)
 - Attempts critical evaluation
- 

What does a First class essay look like?

Does everything a 2:1 does, and:

- Coherent and relevant critical evaluation
 - Broad-based reading
 - Critically links studies together
 - Creates an 'aha' moment for the reader, something they haven't thought about
 - Insightful
 - Convincing argument
- 

Do's and Don'ts

- ✓ Proofread before you hand in
 - ✓ Meet the criteria
 - ✓ Make sure you answer the essay question
 - ✓ Give your opinion as long as it's well-argued
 - ✓ Look at feedback on previous work
 - ✓ Plan your essay
 - ✓ Use appropriate structural devices
 - ✓ Cite relevant work
 - ✓ Practise
- ✗ Leave it to the last minute
 - ✗ Just reiterate what you read
 - ✗ Lose focus of the question
 - ✗ Assume the answer to the essay question is in what you read
 - ✗ Assume there is only one answer
 - ✗ Start writing before you know what you want to say
 - ✗ Plagiarise
- 

Resources

- **General advice:** <https://subjectguides.york.ac.uk/academic-writing/essays>
- **APA Referencing:**
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/apa_changes_7th_edition.html
- **Signposting:** <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/libraryservices/library/asc/documents/public/Short-Guide-Signposting.pdf>
- **Phrases to use in signposting:** <https://www.qub.ac.uk/graduate-school/Filestore/Filetoupload,597684,en.pdf>
- **Structure:** <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/301/study-skills/writing/academic-writing/paragraph-flow-connectivity>
<https://subjectguides.york.ac.uk/skills/essay-structure>
- **Example essays:**
This is a very nice space where students write great pieces on psychological debates and current issues. They write critical reviews on recent papers. DO NOT PLAGIARISE FROM HERE, use it as inspiration:
<https://www.nationalelfservice.net/populations-and-settings/child-and-adolescent/school-based-mental-health-interventions/>

Questions?



**Please give us
feedback**

