



education  
journal  
club

# Critical Thinking

It sounds obvious but the key to critical thinking, or analysis, is to be critical. In order to effectively evaluate a piece of writing you need to focus on actively questioning ideas rather than accepting them on face-value.

Analysing something for a Journal Club isn't quite the same as if you were studying it in-depth at a higher level as the topics can vary between some very different themes. Not everyone, even in a subject-specific group, is going to be an expert, but whilst you won't necessarily be able to compare the article to the wider area of study, there are still lots of things you can consider.

You need to take a systematic approach - identify the main arguments of the piece. How well is the argument supported by background information and is it up to date? Can you make any links between ideas - perhaps from previous Journal Club meetings? Are there any obvious omissions or inconsistencies? Are the conclusions supported?

Try to identify bias within the writing. Look at any information about funding or whether they are leaning towards certain authors in the references; might there be political bias. Recognise your own biases. On an individual, group or school level, are you bringing your own beliefs and values into your analysis. Question whether you are making certain assumptions and why this might be.

Weigh up the arguments that are being put forward and the evidence given to back them up. Have a look at the method or design and think about how this could be improved.

Can you identify any ethical implications of what is being tested. This doesn't just apply to quantitative 'experiments'. Ethics may be particularly worth thinking about if you choose to look at a self-published/ non peer reviewed article or blog post.

Finally, is what is being claimed repeatable? You will be considering how the article relates to your own setting and how you might be able to look at certain ideas in more detail, perhaps to implement. Is the research specific to the setting described or could it move to other settings?

Don't worry about suggesting the wrong thing or opinion, just focus on getting a discussion going - the more directions you tackle it from, the more ways of analysing your group will have.