

Academic  
Learning  
Services

# Reading and Writing Critically

Graduate Studies Workshop

## WHY THIS MATTERS?

Master's work = analytical depth + intellectual independence.

- You are no longer summarizing knowledge.
- You are interrogating it.
- You are positioning yourself within it.
- You are expected to:
  - Identify theoretical gaps
  - Challenge assumptions
  - Engage with debates
  - Produce original insights



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# What is Critical Reading?

01

Actively engaging with arguments

02

Questioning evidence and assumptions

03

Identifying bias, power, and positionality

04

Evaluating methodological rigor

05

Situating work within wider debates

**Highlighting everything**

**Summarizing paragraph by paragraph**

**Critical  
Reading is  
not..**

**Accepting published work as “true”**



**Constructing a clear argument**

**01**

**Using evidence strategically**

**02**

**Engaging with competing perspectives**

**03**

**Showing evaluation, not description**

**04**

**Making your intellectual position visible**

**05**

# What is Critical Writing



Critical writing is not “being negative.”  
It is being analytical and evidence-driven.



# **PART I: READING CRITICALLY**

## Surface Reading

## Critical Reading

What does it say?

What does it do?

What is the argument?

How is the argument constructed?

What evidence is used?

Is the evidence sufficient, biased, selective?

What is concluded?

What is missing or excluded?

## Three Layers of Reading

1. **Argument Layer** - What is being claimed?
2. **Methodological Layer** - How was knowledge generated?
3. **Epistemological Layer**- What assumptions about knowledge underpin this?

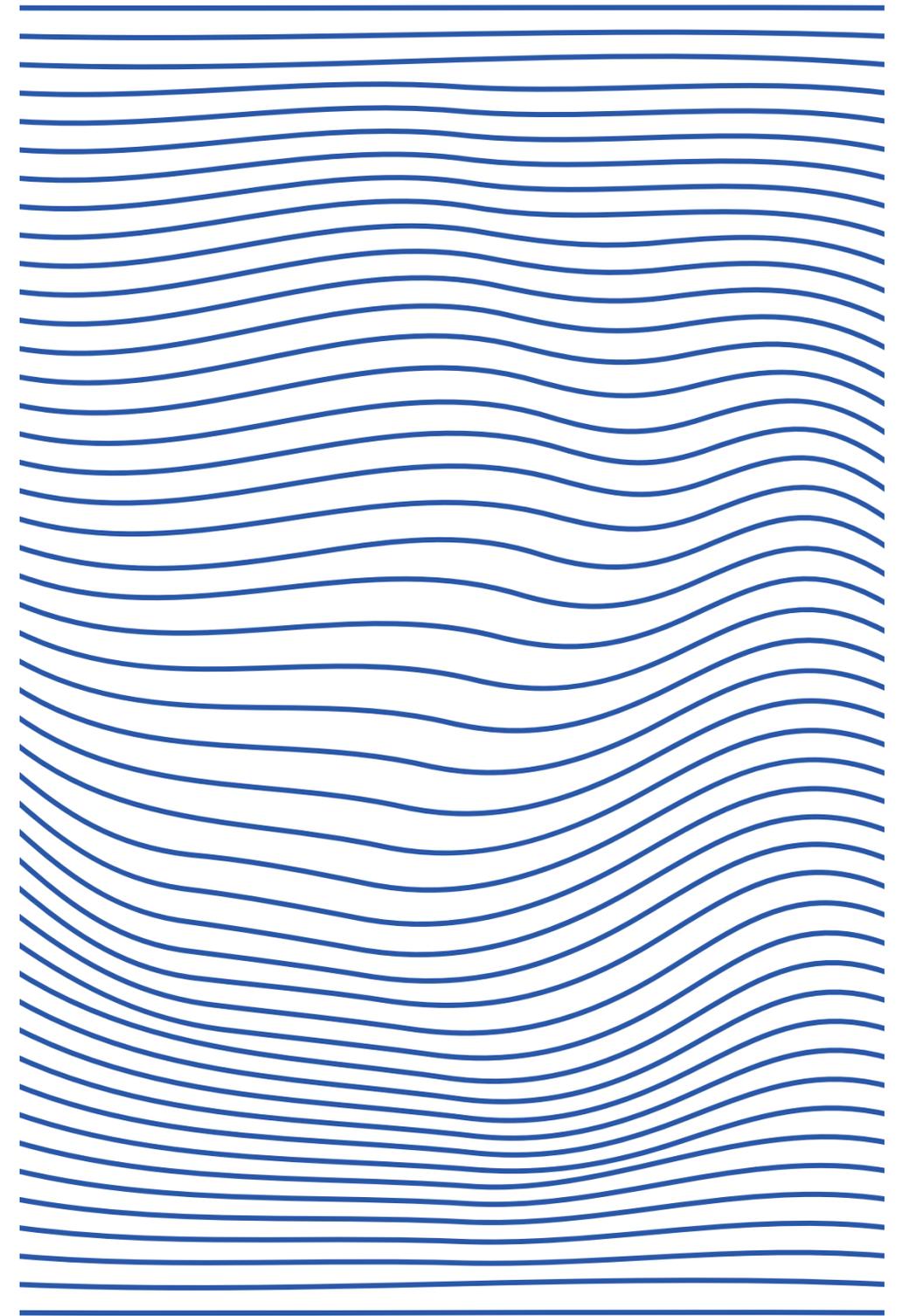
**Master's students engage all three.**



# Step 1: Identify the Core Argument

Ask:

- What is the central claim?
- Is it explicit or implicit?
- What problem is the author responding to?
- Who are they arguing against?
- Tip: Reduce the article to ONE sentence.



# Step 2: Interrogate the Assumptions

**Ask:**

Every argument rests on assumptions.

What is taken for granted?

What theoretical lens is being used?

What worldview underpins this argument?

What is considered “normal” or “natural”?

# Step 3: Evaluate the Evidence

Questions to ask:

Is the evidence empirical, theoretical, anecdotal?

Is the sample representative?

Is the methodology appropriate?

Are counterexamples addressed?

Is correlation confused with causation?  
Master's level = evaluate methodological rigor.



# Step 4: Situate the Text in the Literature



**Critical reading requires contextual awareness.**

- What debate is this text part of?
- Is it advancing, refining, or rejecting existing theory?
- Does it build on dominant scholarship or challenge it?
- Is it innovative or derivative?



## Step 5: Identify What is Missing

Often the most powerful critique is about absence.

- Whose voices are excluded?
- What alternative explanations are ignored?
- Are certain regions, groups, or variables overlooked?
- What are the limitations?

Absence can reveal bias.

# Language as Power

## Pay attention to:

- Loaded language
- Framing of actors (e.g., “illegal” vs “undocumented”)
- Passive vs active voice
- Certainty vs hedging

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**Language shapes knowledge production.**



## Critical Reading Framework

When reading, annotate using:

- **ARG (Argument)**
- **EVD (Evidence)**
- **ASS (Assumptions)**
- **METH (Methodology)**
- **GAP (Missing elements)**
- **POS (Author's positionality)**

**Make reading systematic.**

# PART II: THINKING CRITICALLY

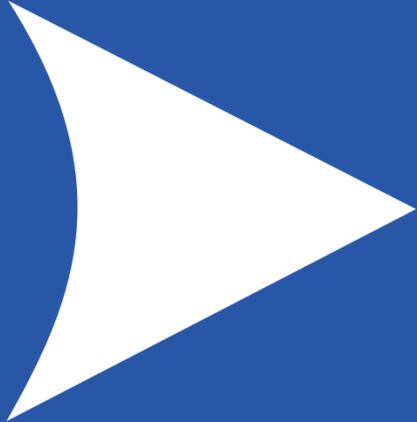
# Description vs Analysis vs Critique

**Description: What happened?**

**Analysis: Why and how did it happen?**

**Critique: What are the strengths, limits, and implications?**

**Master's writing requires all three — but emphasizes critique.**



# Types of Critical Engagement

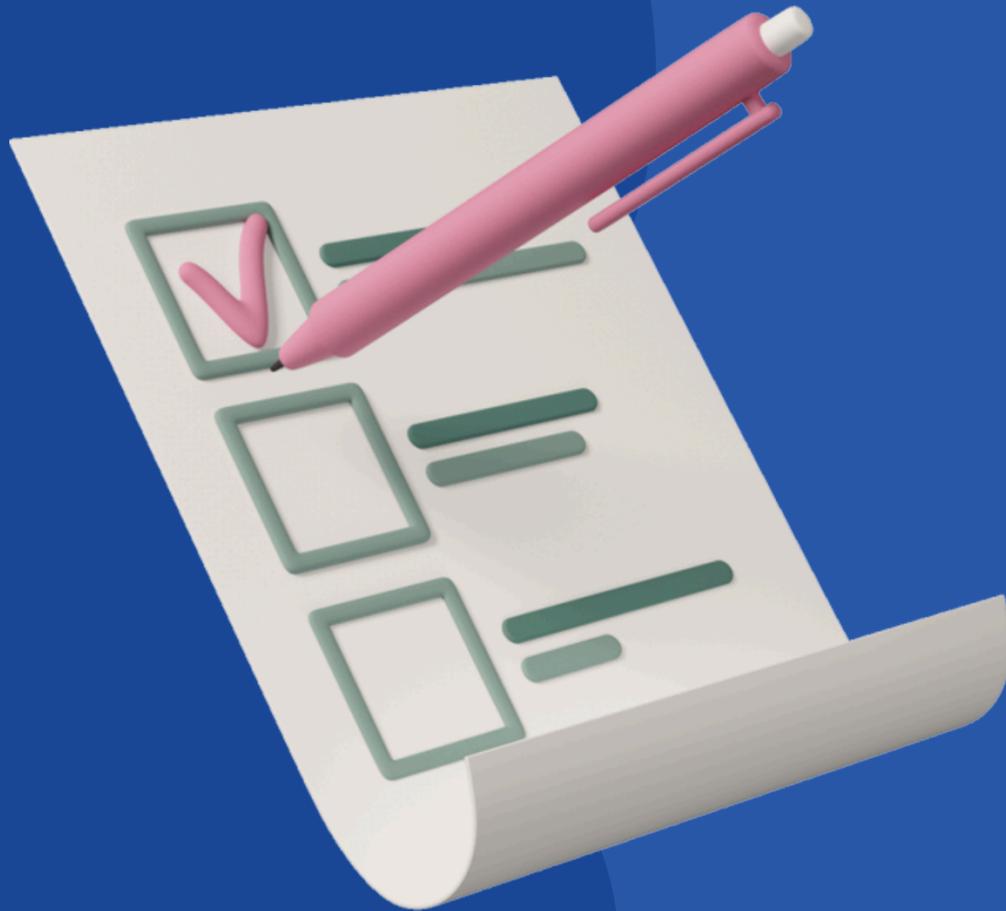
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You can:

- Compare theories
- Challenge methodology
- Identify contradictions
- Extend arguments
- Apply theory to new cases
- Propose refinements

Critique ≠ attack

Critique = intellectual dialogue





# Intellectual Humility

Critical thinking requires:

- Recognizing complexity
- Avoiding binary thinking
- Acknowledging uncertainty
- Being open to revision

Strong scholars question themselves too.



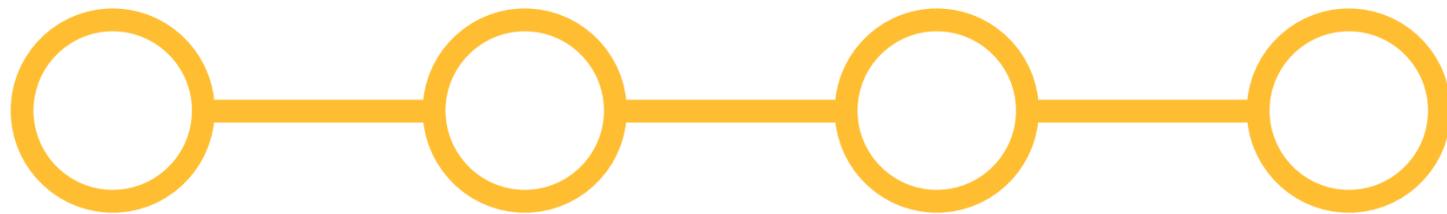
# ➤ Logical Fallacies to Avoid

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- Overgeneralization
- False causality
- Strawman arguments
- False dichotomies
- Appeal to authority

# **PART III: WRITING CRITICALLY**





# THE STRUCTURE OF A CRITICAL ESSAY

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- Clear thesis statement
- Context of debate
- Theoretical framework
- Evaluation of evidence
- Engagement with counterarguments
- Analytical conclusion Argument drives structure.

# Writing a Strong Thesis

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## Weak thesis:

"This essay will discuss globalization."

## Strong thesis:

"While globalization has increased economic interdependence, its benefits remain structurally unequal due to embedded power asymmetries in global governance institutions."

## A thesis must:

Take a position

Be arguable

Signal complexity

# ► Strategic Hedging

Hedging is not weakness.

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Use:

- “This suggests...”
- “This indicates...”
- “This may imply...”
- “The evidence points toward...”

Avoid absolute certainty unless justified.



# MOVING FROM SUMMARY TO ANALYSIS ➤

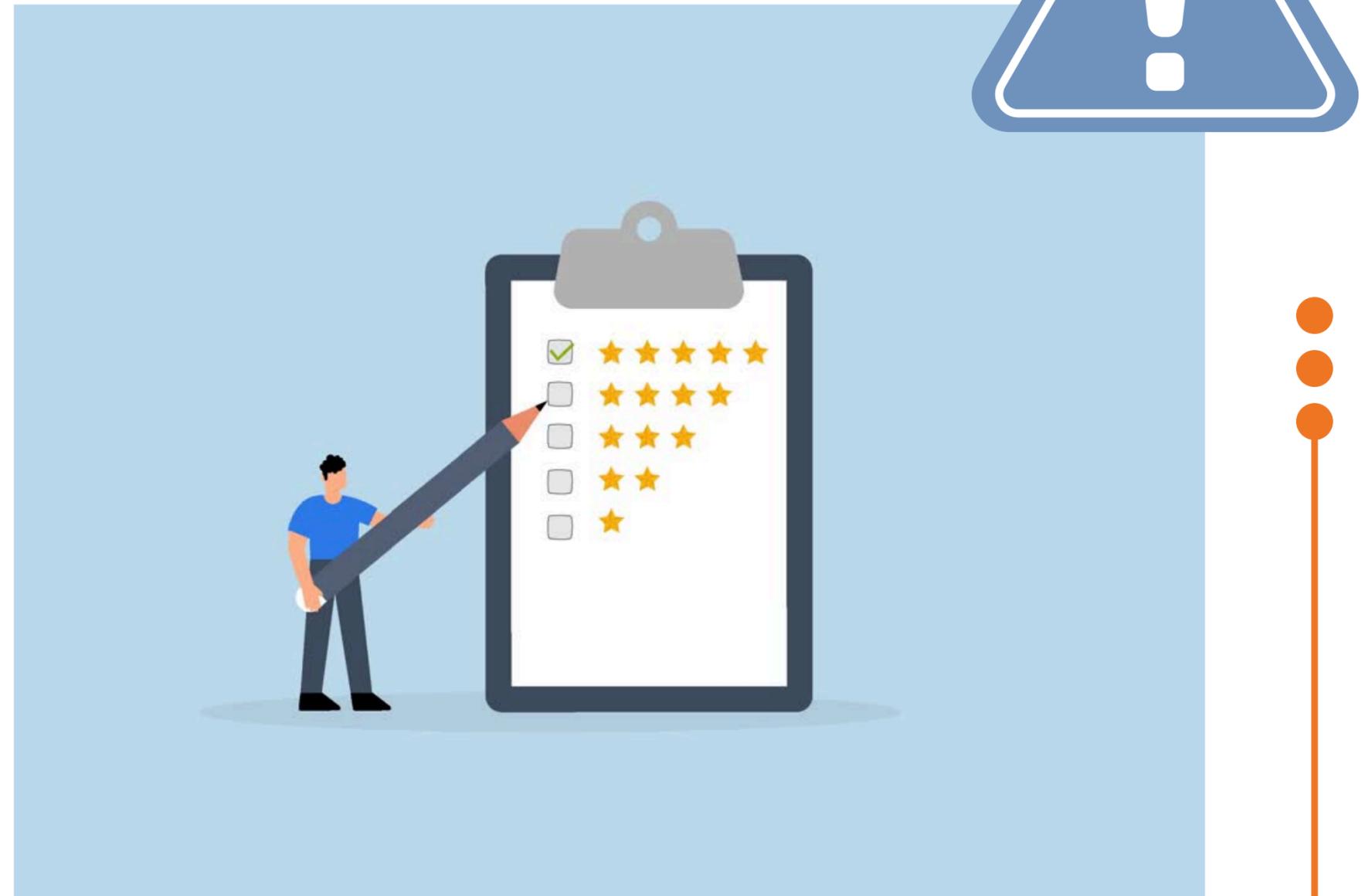
## **Instead of:**

Smith argues that X causes Y.

## **Write:**

Smith's argument that X causes Y is persuasive in its empirical grounding; however, it overlooks structural variable Z, which weakens its explanatory scope.

**Always add evaluation.**





# INTEGRATING SOURCES CRITICALLY

**Then compare and evaluate.**

**Avoid:**

Author-by-author paragraphs

**Instead:**

Organize by themes or debates

**Example:**

**Theme: State Power**

- Author A: institutional focus
- Author B: economic lens
- Author C: cultural critique

# The “They Say / I Say” Model

Never let sources dominate your voice.

Next Page →

Academic writing is a conversation.

1. They say (existing literature)
2. I say (your position)
3. Why it matters (implications)





Use language such as:

## Signposting Critical Engagement

“However...”

“This interpretation assumes...”

“A limitation of this approach is...”

“This raises the question of...”

“While persuasive, this argument fails to...”

These signal analytical depth.



# ENGAGING COUNTERARGUMENTS

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Strong writing anticipates objections.

- What would critics say?
- Where is your argument weakest?
- How can you respond?

Addressing counterarguments strengthens credibility.

# AVOIDING COMMON MASTER'S-LEVEL MISTAKES

## DEPTH > BREADTH.

- Over-description
- Over-quoting
- Lack of clear argument
- Ignoring methodology
- False neutrality
- Sweeping generalizations



# **CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEWS**



**A LITERATURE REVIEW IS NOT A SUMMARY LIST.**

**IT SHOULD:**

- **MAP THE FIELD**
- **IDENTIFY DEBATES**
- **HIGHLIGHT TENSIONS**
- **SHOW METHODOLOGICAL PATTERNS**
- **REVEAL GAPS**
- **JUSTIFY YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION**
- **YOUR REVIEW SHOULD LEAD TO A RESEARCH PROBLEM.**



# PROBLEM STATEMENT: DEFINING RESEARCH GAP



<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Clear Formulation</b>	The central research objective and questions must be specific, well-articulated, and directly address a gap in the existing literature.
<b>Scientific Importance</b>	Highlight the theoretical or conceptual contribution your research makes to the existing body of knowledge.
<b>Practical Importance</b>	Explain the real-world implications, applications, or benefits of addressing the problem.
<b>Evidence-Based</b>	Support the existence of the problem with credible citations, statistics, or references to prior research.

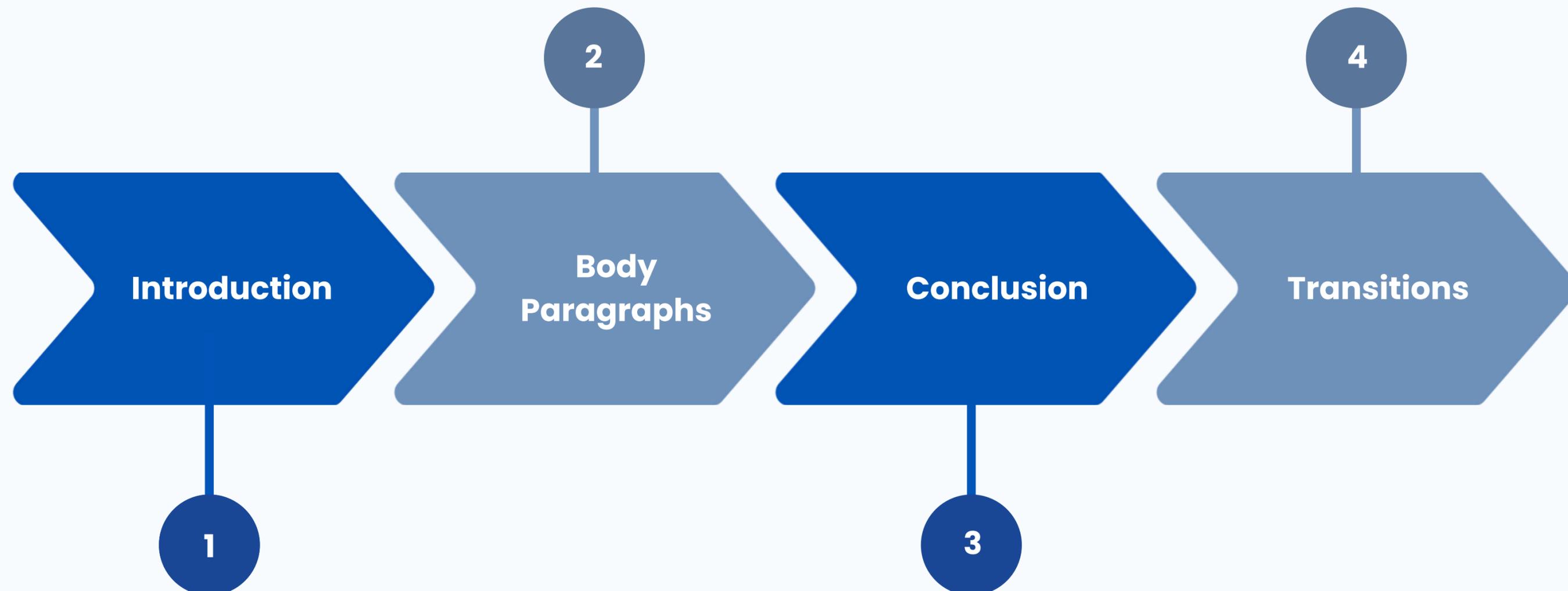


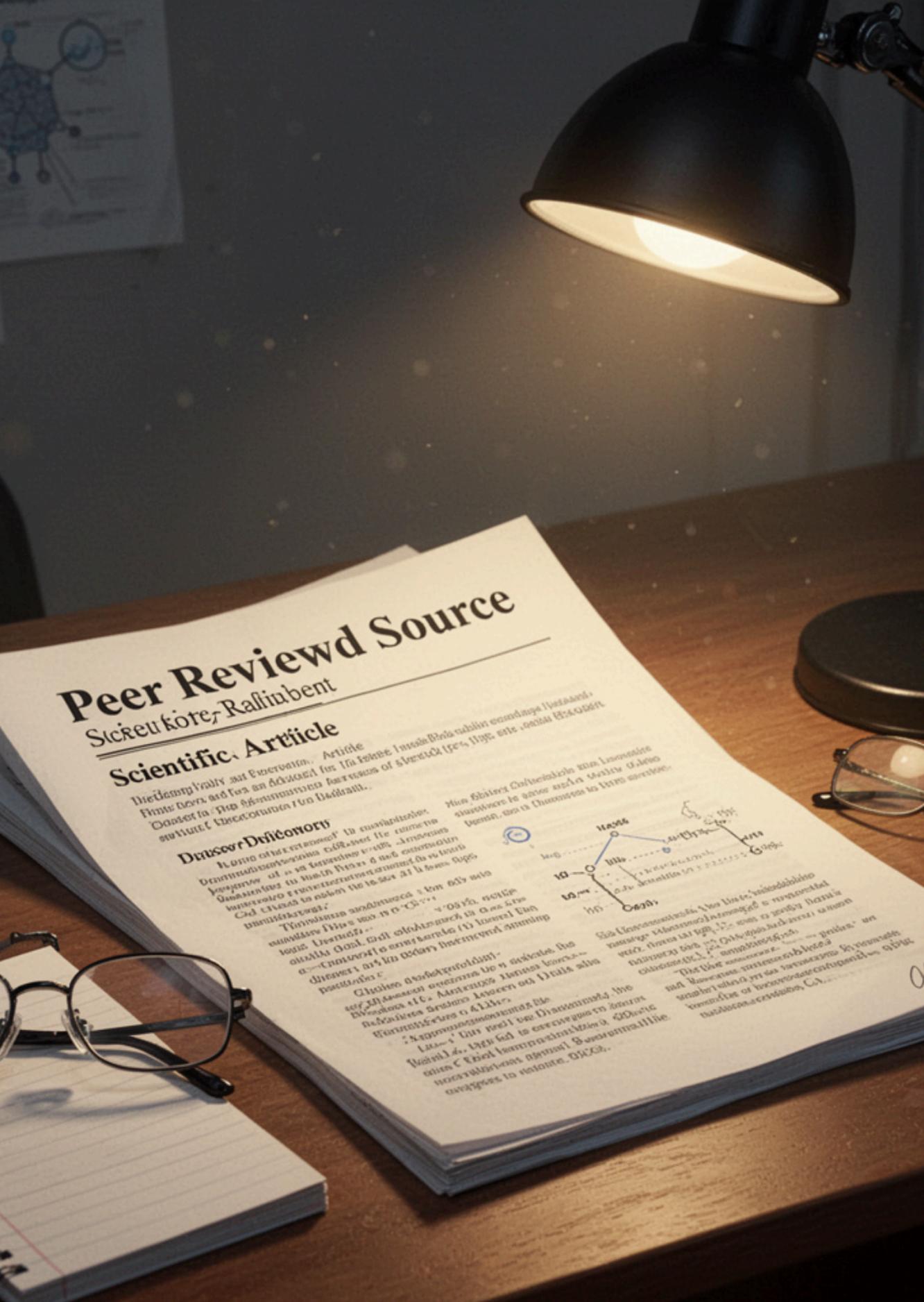
# The Perfect Structural Blueprint

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A Clear Flow Guides the Reader Through the Literature

Next Page →





# QUALITY OVER QUANTITY IN SOURCE SELECTION

Evaluating Credibility and Relevance is Essential

Next Page →

- **THE CRAAP TEST:** EVALUATE SOURCES FOR CURRENCY, RELEVANCE, AUTHORITY, ACCURACY, AND PURPOSE.
- **LANDMARK STUDIES:** IDENTIFY THE "PIVOTAL" PUBLICATIONS THAT EVERYONE IN THE FIELD CITES.
- **CRITICAL QUESTIONS:** WHAT PROBLEM IS THE AUTHOR ADDRESSING? WHAT ARE THE KEY THEORIES? ARE THE METHODS ROBUST?
- **NOTE-TAKING: DON'T JUST READ;** TAKE NOTES ON FINDINGS, STRENGTHS, AND WEAKNESSES IMMEDIATELY TO AVOID RE-READING LATER.

# TONE IN CRITICAL WRITING

You should be...

Next Page →

**ANALYTICAL**

**1**

**EVIDENCE-BASED**

**2**

**PRECISE**

**3**

**RESPECTFUL**

**4**

# tone in critical writing

You should avoid...

Next Page →

**Emotional  
language**

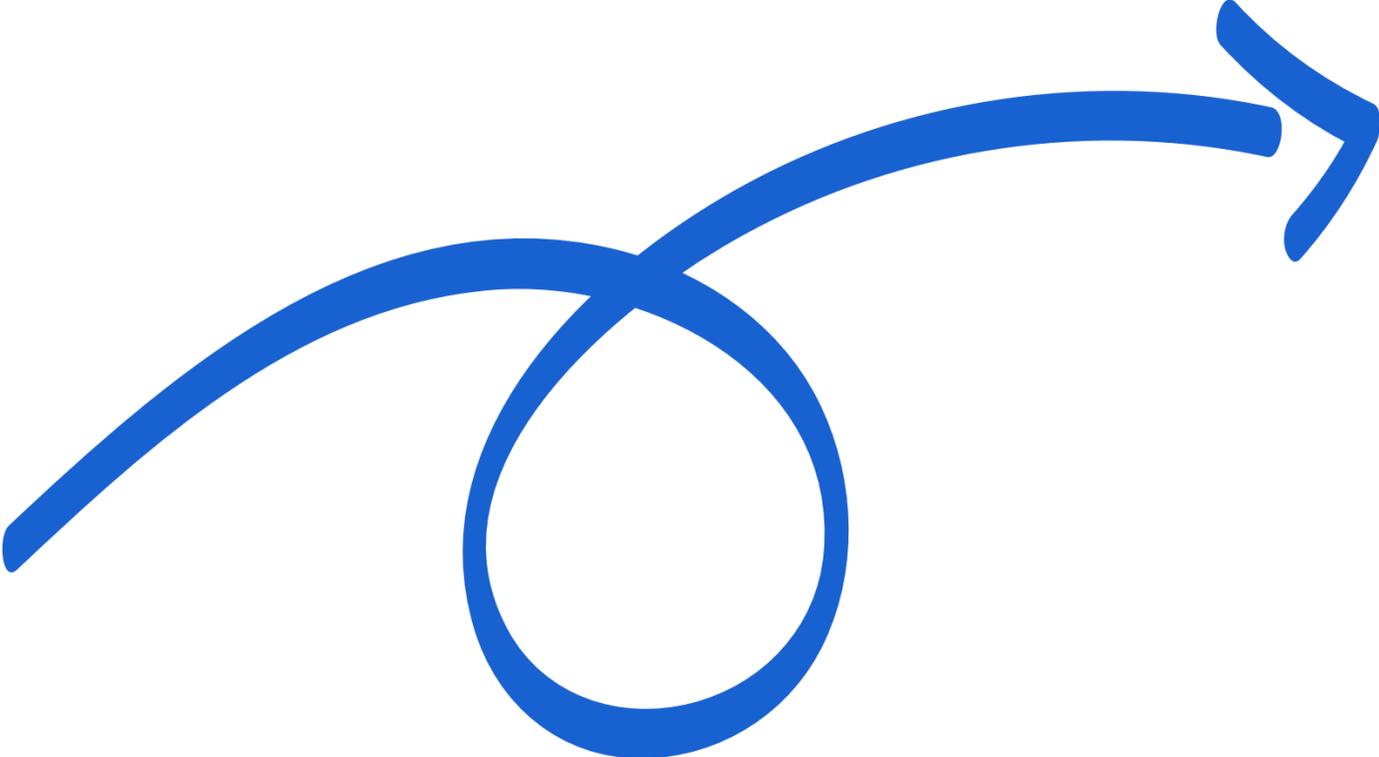
**1**

**Personal attacks**

**2**

**Overconfidence  
without evidence**

**3**



# Critical Writing Checklist

**Before submitting, ask:**

- **Is my argument clear in the introduction?**
- **Have I evaluated evidence?**
- **Have I acknowledged limitations?**
- **Have I engaged counterarguments?**
- **Is my conclusion analytical (not repetitive)?**

# EXERCISE: CRITICAL READING

Try this at home

Next Page →

## Identify:

- **Core argument**
- **2 assumptions**
- **1 methodological limitation**
- **1 missing perspective**
- **Discuss.**



# WRITING EXERCISE

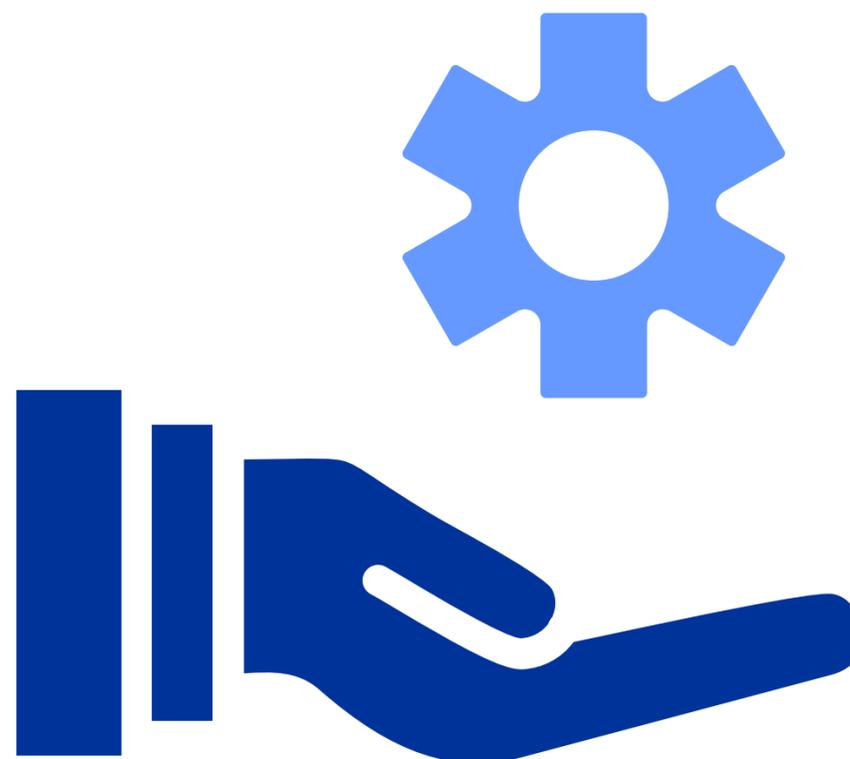
Try this at home

Next Page →

**Write a 150–word critical paragraph responding to an argument.**

**Must include:**

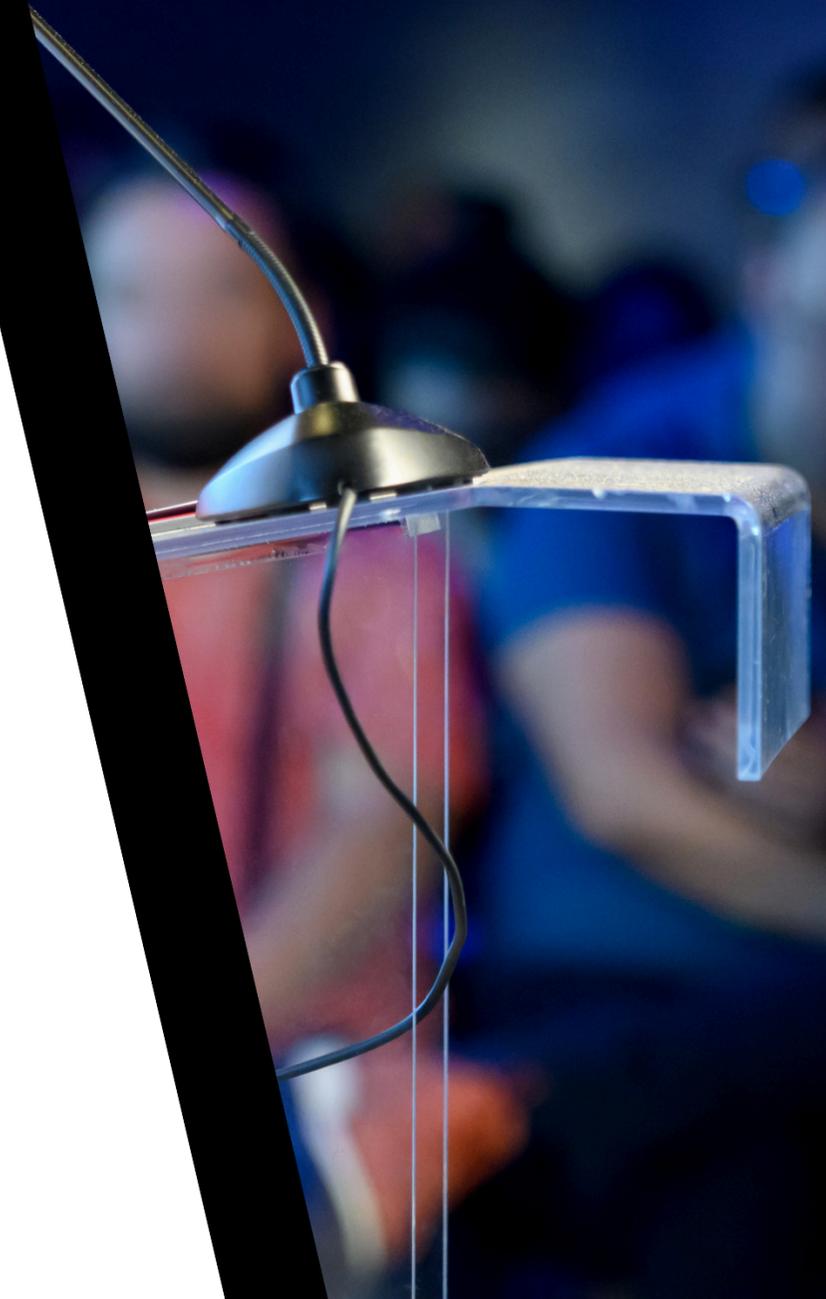
- **Evaluation**
- **Limitation**
- **Counterpoint**



**You should:**

# At Master's level:

- Question what you read
- Justify what you write
- Position yourself in debates
- Embrace complexity
- Recognize knowledge as constructed
- You are not just learning arguments.
- You are learning how arguments are built — and how to build your own.



# WRITING WITH CRITICALITY, NOT JUST DESCRIPTION

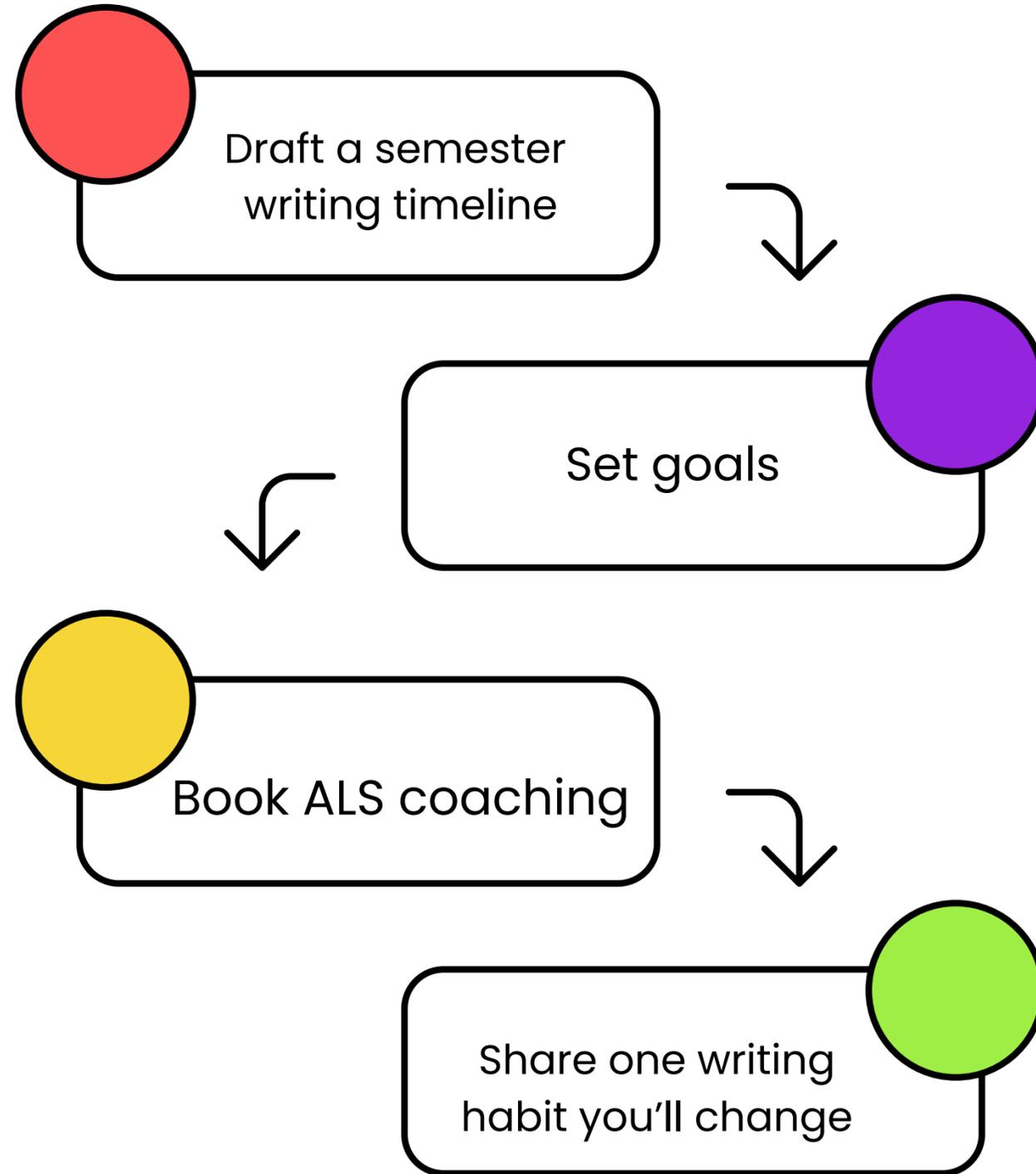
Synthesis is the Art of Connecting the Dots

Next Page →

- **Summary vs. Synthesis:** Summary tells what one author said; Synthesis tells what the field says.
- **Analyze and Interpret:** Don't just paraphrase; discuss the significance of findings in relation to the whole.
- **Critically Evaluate:** Mention strengths and weaknesses. "While Smith (2020) provides a robust framework, the small sample size limits generalizability."
- **Voice:** Your voice should lead the review, using sources as evidence for your claims.

# WRAP-UP & ACTION PLAN

## ACTION STEPS:





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**Thank  
You.**