

Approaches to critical reading and writing

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Outline for today

- Introduction
- Considering your writing practices
- Reading as part of writing
- Writing as part of thinking
- Planning
- Organising written work
- Looking at text
- Finding time to write

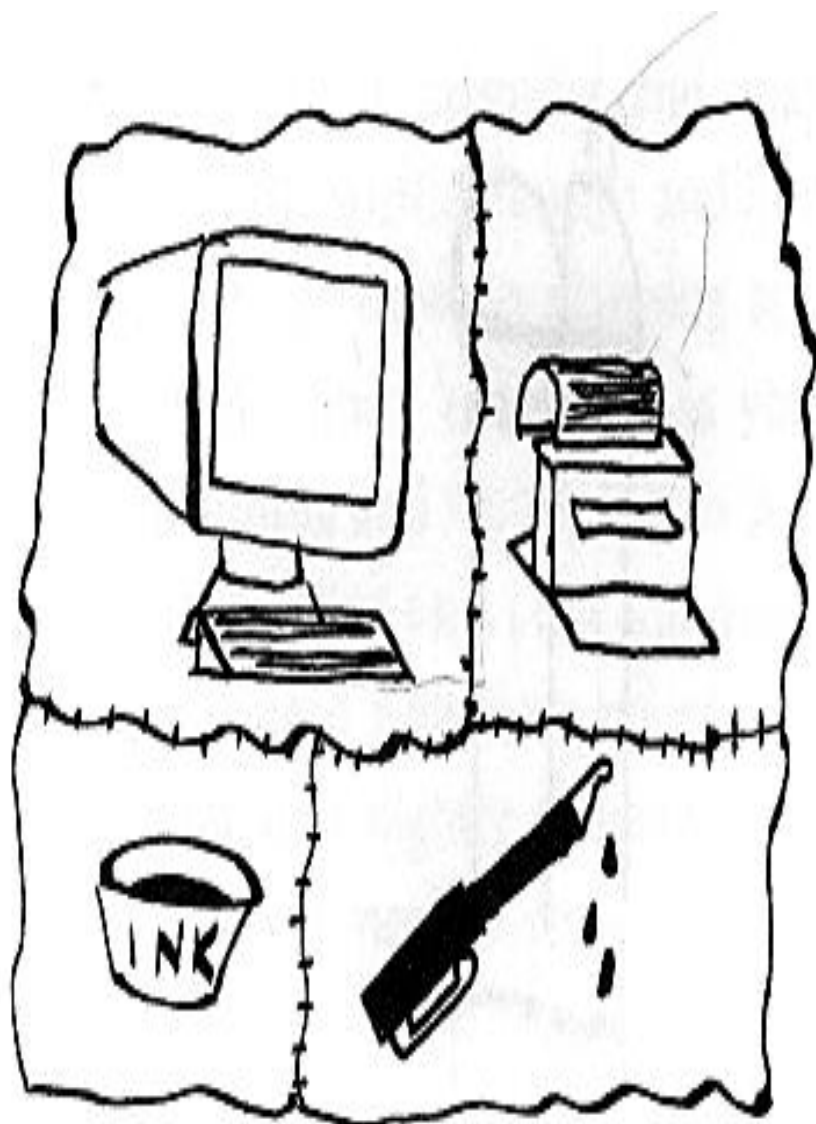
What type of writer are you?



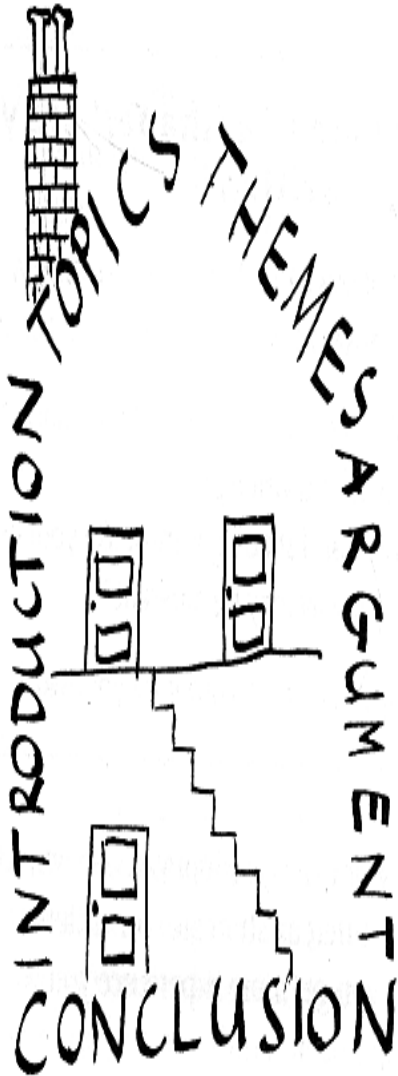
diver



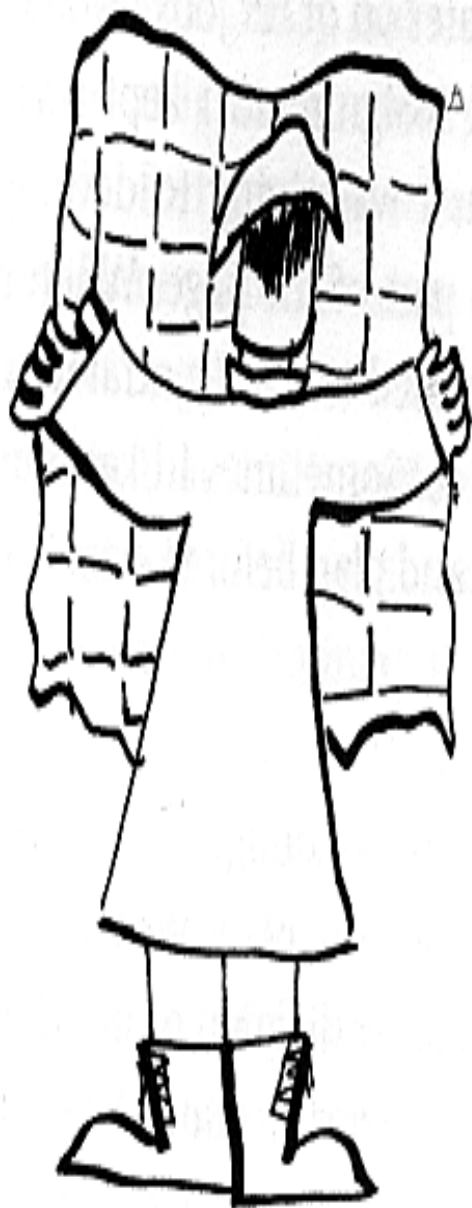
The patchworker



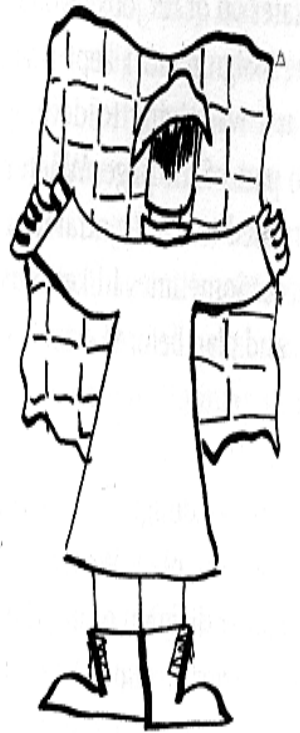
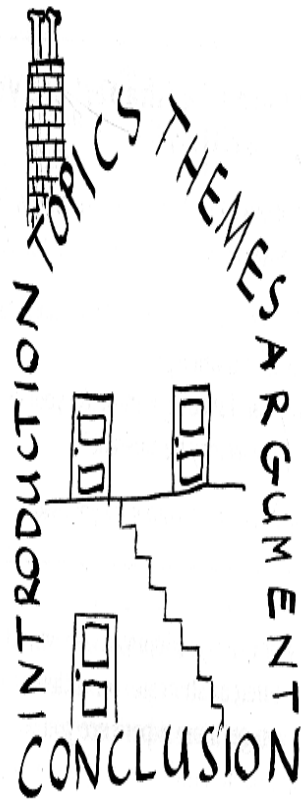
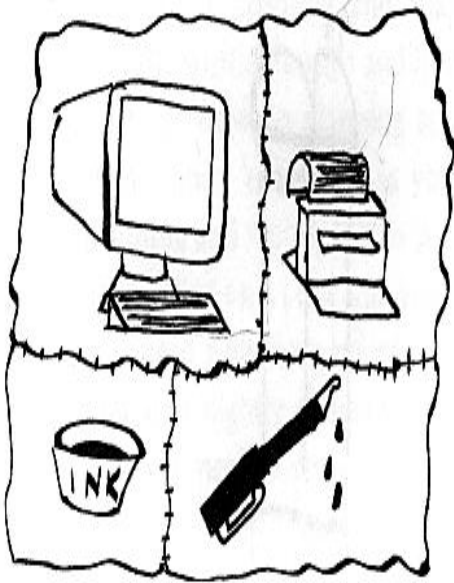
The architect



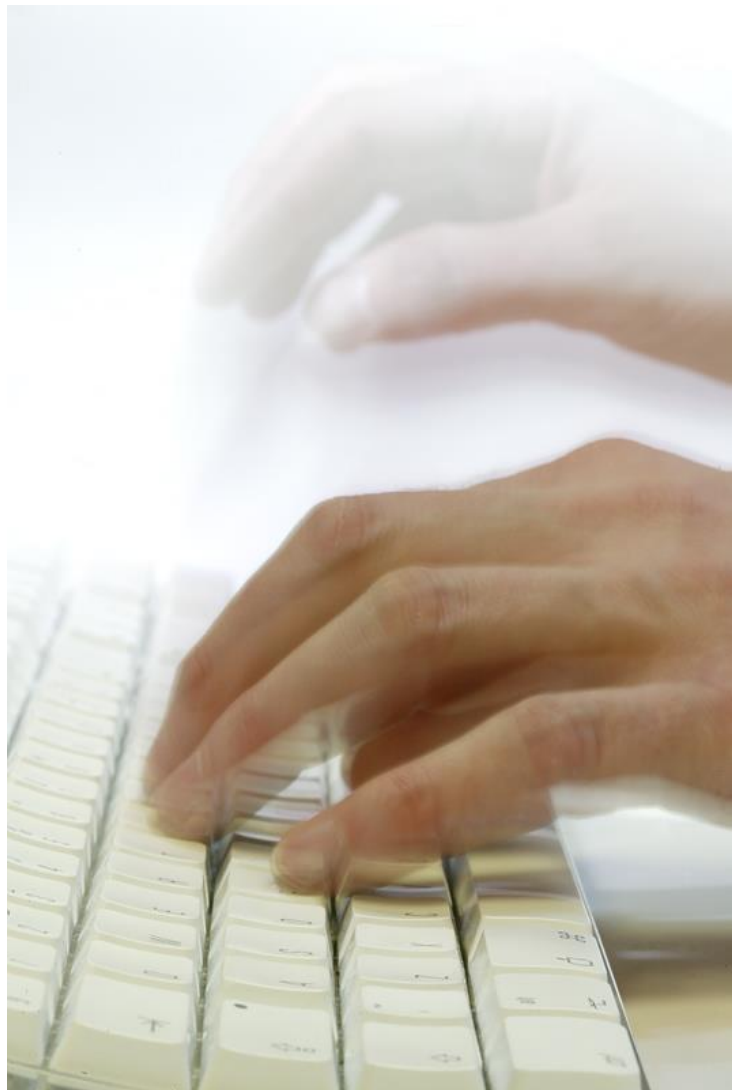
The grand planner



Identifying your writing style



Previous writing experiences ...



Reading as part of writing



Critical reading (and how it benefits your writing)

- Helps you determine what is and what is not a robust piece of research and writing in your field
- Helps you identify where existing research has left a gap that your work could fill
- Attention you pay to writing of others helps you become more self-aware of your own written work:
 - Sufficient evidence to back up claims; argumentation/reasoning; becoming alert to your assumptions and how they affect your claims
 - Wallace and Wray, 2006

Critical reading?

How do you go about
reading an academic text
in your field?



Critical reading? Some possible approaches

How do you go about reading an academic text?

- Use parts of the text: abstract, contents, index, sub-headings, graphs, tables, introduction and conclusion
- Skim to get the gist of the argument
- Read with questions in mind

Critical reading? Some possible approaches

- Make notes/mind map/ use highlighter
- Write a summary in your own words
- Write a brief critical response
- Keep note of bibliographic details

Critical reading/ critical writing

Handout – p. 12-13 Wallace and Wray

- As a critical reader, one evaluates the attempts of others to communicate with and convince their target audience by means of developing an argument;
- As a writer, one develops one's own argument, making it as strong and as clear as possible, so as to communicate with and convince one's target audience.

– Wallace and Wray, 2006

Free writing

- Way of using writing as a tool for thinking
- Allows you to write without constraints.

To do it –

Write continuously, in complete sentences, anything that occurs to you.



Free writing

Please write down EITHER

1. An idea / theme from your field

OR

2. Use the topic:

‘what I enjoy about writing...’

Use a free writing technique to write anything at all that occurs to you about this topic.

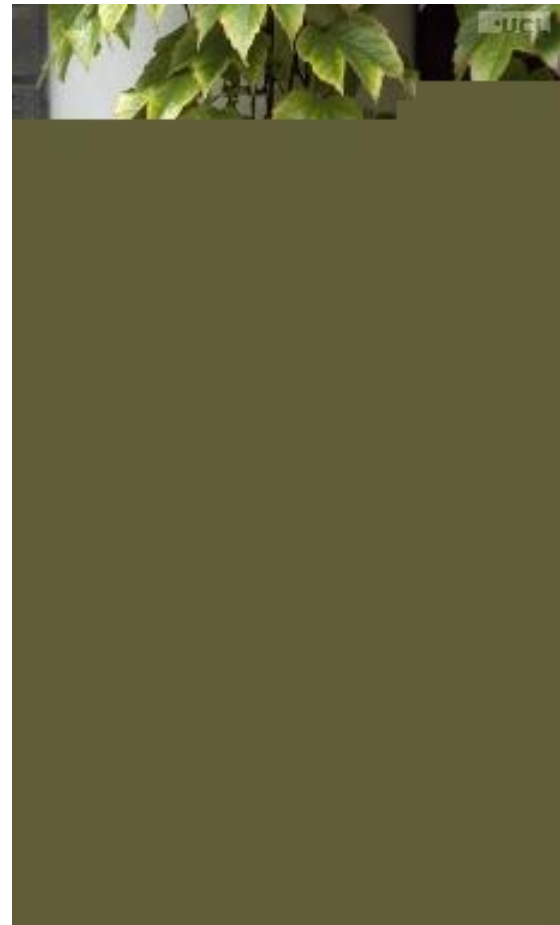
This writing will not be shown to anyone else.

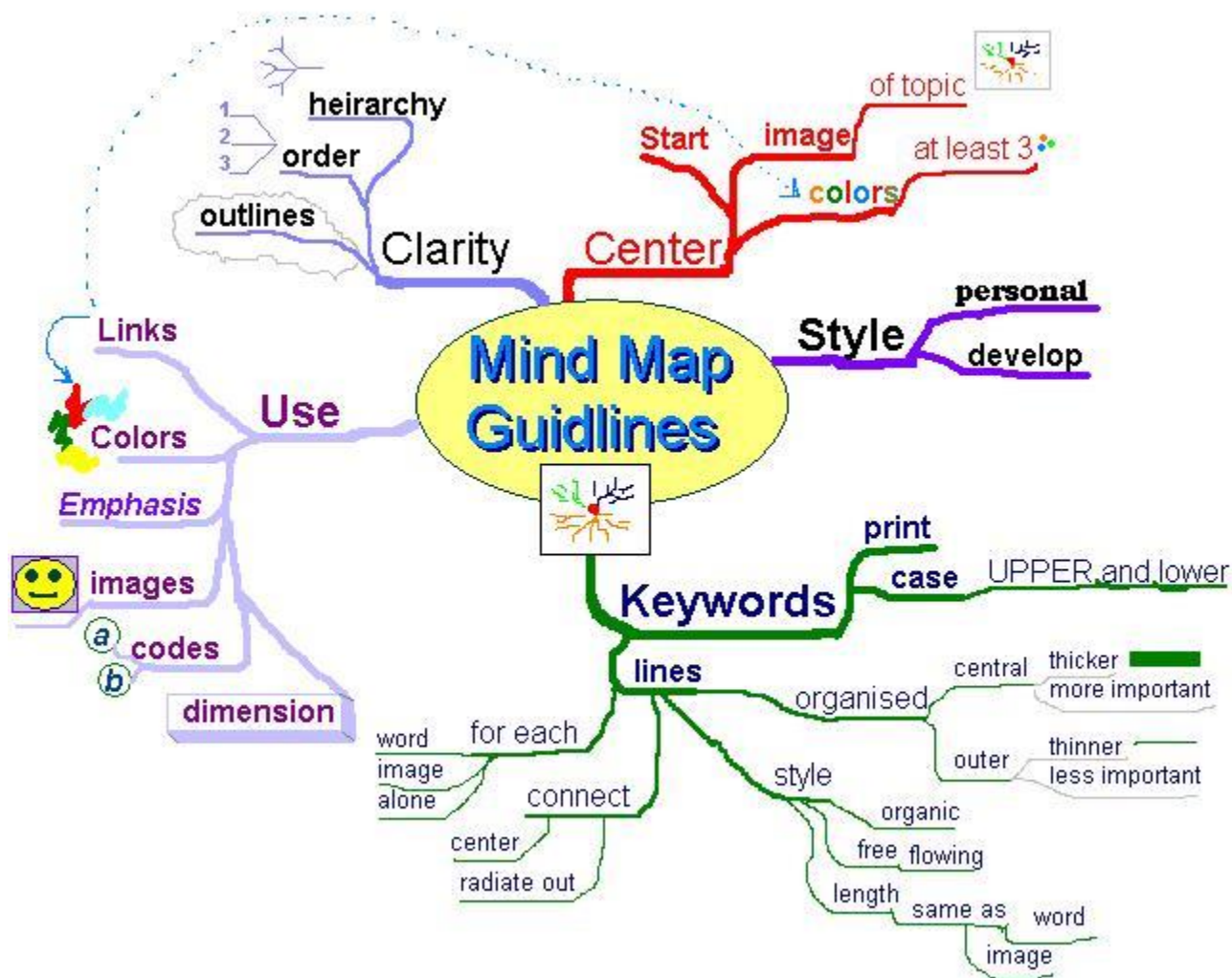
Planning (Sharples)

- Plans should be flexible
- Through the writing process a deeper understanding of topic is gained – thus, planning is increasingly out of step as writing develops:
 - “The act of writing brings into being ideas and intentions that the writer never had at the start of the task or that could not be expressed in any detail.”

Plans

- Free writing
 - Notes/sketches
 - Idea lists
 - Ideas on post-it notes
 - Mind map
 - Skeleton paper with sub-headings
 - Outline
 - Draft text
-
- Adapted from Sharples, 1999





- What techniques do you use to develop ideas in your writing and/or signpost an argument?



Developing/sustaining argument

- ‘proving’ the thesis statement or controlling argument
- Signposting argument (Giving the reader cues; anticipating/referring back)
- Using words which signal transition or development – “However”, “Nevertheless”, “Thus”, “Therefore”, “Despite”
- Illustrating theoretical positions with concrete examples
- Generalising from a particular set of findings if possible
- Using subheadings
- Using/responding to counterarguments and examples
- Anticipate next paragraph at end of previous one

Signposting and making transitions

- **Links between paragraphs** – pick up point from the end of a paragraph at the start of next one.
- **Conjunctions to express different kinds of meaning relations**
 - **Temporal**: when, while, after, before, then
 - **Causative**: because, if, although, so that, therefore
 - **Adversative**: however, alternatively, although, nevertheless, while
 - **Additive**: and, or, similarly, incidentally
- Signposting through **pronouns** - this, these, those, that, they, it, them
- **Adverbs**: Firstly, secondly, etc
- **Illustrative**: For example, in illustration, that is to say,

Signalling conclusions

less endorsing —————→ **more endorsing**

claim
contend
suggest
argue
in x's opinion
believe
think
reckon
assume
presume
speculate
x goes so far as to
suggest that
propose

comment
say
report
state
declare
point out
announce
cite
note
observe
write
tell
describe
put forward
explain
make the point
postulate
theorise
posit
predict
see
in the view of
according to

affirms
confirms
agree
concur
make clear
maintain

Taken from: Teaching
Academic Writing, Coffin
et al. 2003

Citation

Examples of Citing

- The hip bone is confirmed to be connected to the thigh bone (Funny Bones, 1989).
- The cytoskeletal network acts like the strong bars within a scaffolding (Alberts *et al.*, 1998)
- Slavic-Smith (2006) postulated three classifications for nucleoli in neurons
- It was shown in 2006 by Take That, that a successful comeback tour was possible [1].

Bibliographies

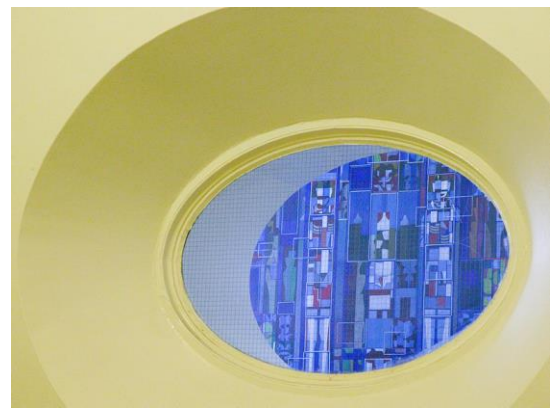
- Alberts, Bray, Johnson, Lewis, Raff, Roberts & Walter. Essential Cell Biology, 1st Edition, Garland, 1998
- Dickson, B (2002) Molecular Mechanisms of Axon Guidance. Science 298 1959-1964
- [1] www.bbc.co.uk/news

Writing tips

- Write a sentence for each paragraph you want to write – you can then move them about easily to form thread of argument
- Index tag the main points you want to use in your references, so they can be found easily while writing
- Write the introduction last
- Write the conclusion first
- Read what you have written aloud to see if it sounds right
- Find best environment for you – when and where do you work best
- Take a break before trying to do your final check
- Use a writing checklist

Making time for writing

- Write throughout the course
- Do free writing as frequently as possible
- Snack and binge writing (Rowena Murray)
- Writing groups
- Don't wait until you feel 'ready' to write...





Writing for learning

- Read regularly in the field. Find writers whose work you admire and study what and how they do things.
- View writing as part of a process rather than a product
- Find models of good writing in your discipline – analyse it; ask what works and what doesn't; consider writing style; vocabulary; techniques – metaphor; explanation; signposting
- Reflect on your own writing practices
- Keep a notebook or learning journal
- Explore free writing

To sum up...

1. Asked 'what type of writer are you'? What are your writing practices?
2. What are your approaches to reading? How might you link reading and writing?
3. Free writing as a means of generating ideas
4. Thought about structure of the essay at the paragraph level and the overall level
5. Tried to relate these ideas back to the outline.