

50 Ways to Up Your Critical Analysis Game

Having trouble transitioning from descriptive writing to deeper critical analysis? Want to make the leap from simply noting strengths and weaknesses to interrogating texts and developing their own critical perspective? This list stems from several years of assembling advice for improving critical writing and pushing ideas further. Although this list is by no means exhaustive, I hope it will spark new ideas wherever you are in your writing process! Please send additional suggestions or feedback to Nina M. Flores via email nina.flores@gmail.com or twitter: @bellhookedme.

1. Consider writer positionality, including your own
2. Identify frames and how people write about the topic or issue
3. Work to uncover hidden biases and locate unquestioned assumptions
4. Can you use other texts to see this material in a new way?
5. Can you use other texts to identify gaps in this material?
6. Which experiences are included? Excluded? Is this intentional?
7. Illustrate how dominant ideologies become invisible, embedded in accepted knowledge
8. Critique your own viewpoint — how are you approaching the piece? What are your biases?
9. Take a step back, write from the bigger picture
10. Take a step in, tease out a specific element to analyze
11. Write about an old issue in a new context — change the time, place, location
12. Break down dichotomies
13. Relate to your own knowledge on the issue
14. Find ways to add your narrative
15. Consider discourses of individuality versus community
16. Consider discourses of empowerment versus disempowerment
17. What are the implications for social justice?
18. Any policy implications? Who benefits?
19. What are the implications for future research?
20. Identify your research agenda, your action agenda, your vision
21. Push existing ideas further
22. Unpack ideas — what is being argued? What are you trying to add to the conversation?
23. Unpack power dynamics — how is power manifested throughout the text?
24. Challenge the structures within which a text is written
25. Challenge language choices
26. Apply a new theoretical framework
27. Expand conceptual definitions
28. Challenge universality
29. Help readers unlearn
30. Give credit to past ideas — know when your ideas are not new
31. Apply critical lenses: consider political, social, economic, and cultural implications
32. Apply critical lenses: consider implications related to urban, suburban, or rural contexts

33. Apply critical lenses: consider implications related to sex, sexual orientation, sexuality, and heteronormativity
34. Apply critical lenses: consider implications related to gender, gender identity, gender expression, and whether someone is cis-gendered
35. Apply critical lenses: consider implications related to race, ethnicity, creed, and color
36. Apply critical lenses: consider implications related to immigration, migration, citizenship, and being undocumented
37. Apply critical lenses: consider implications stemming from age, ageism, cultural perspectives on age, and assigning value or devaluing people based on age
38. Apply critical lenses: consider implications related to mental health and physical abilities
39. Apply critical lenses: consider implications related to class, caste, and economic inequalities
40. Apply critical lenses: consider implications related to the global political economy, capitalism, and neoliberalism
41. Examine the impact of imperialism, neo-colonialism, and global hegemony
42. Examine the impact of devaluing indigenous knowledge
43. Take a global perspective on the issue
44. Explore intersectional identities of all of the above
45. Set boundaries: Identify your limitations. Explain your definitions, your approach, your arguments, your methods
46. Add deeper understanding by answering the hows and whys with qualitative evidence
47. Look to past writing and research to anticipate a trajectory for the future
48. Look to the future to imagine a new way of understanding
49. Offer specific alternatives and/or a range of next steps to unfold over time
50. And most importantly, write with the confidence that your words, your perspectives, and your analysis deserves to be read, respected, and thoughtfully considered.

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