



The Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

Guide to the Critical Essay Question

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Why have a Critical Essay Question?



- Tests skills that:
 - are not adequately sampled by other assessment methods
 - are seen as essential for consultant psychiatrists

What is tested by the CEQ?



- Ability to evaluate & critically appraise a proposition concerning psychiatry
- Ability to apply an evidence base in the critical assessment of such a proposition
- Capacity for balanced reasoning
- Ability to consider different points of view
- Awareness of broader social, cultural and philosophical models of illness
- Ability to express a professional opinion clearly in written prose under time pressure

Critical Essay Question



- Starts with a quote (related to psychiatry)
- The quote often is from an opinion piece, editorial, lecture etc. where the author states something a little controversial or contentious.
- The candidate is asked: "In essay form, critically discuss this statement from different points of view and provide your conclusion"
- 40 marks = 40 minutes

Example



In essay form, critically discuss the following statement from different points of view and provide your conclusion.

"Cognitive psychologists have shown us how our intuition can be fooled. We can be gullible. Critical thinking is required to avoid common fallacies. Metacognition can help us monitor our thinking and avoid mistakes."

Reference: Brush, J. (2013). *The science of the art of medicine*. ISBN 978-0-615-81132-1. p123.

Used in February 2015

Changes – 2012 CBFP



- Standard is **junior consultant** level
- Must pass CEQ to pass essay style paper
- New marking domains

Marking: 2012 Fellowship Program


- Ten possible domains for marking
- Each domain matched to Fellowship competencies
- Each domain marked from 0-5
- Domains chosen specifically for each CEQ based on relevance
- Each chosen domain receives a weighting based on relevance to the question being asked

	Fellowship Competencies	Focus of assessment
1	Communicator	Able to communicate clearly (e.g. spelling, grammar)
2	Scholar	Able to critically evaluate statement
3	Medical expert, Communicator, Scholar	Able to develop a number of lines of relevant argument
4	Medical expert, Scholar	Information is factually correct
5	Medical expert, Health advocate, Professional	Understands broader model of health care; cultural context
6	Professional	Appropriate ethical awareness
7	Medical expert, Collaborator	Understanding of patient-centred care, carers, recovery model
8	Medical expert, Collaborator, Manager	Able to apply to clinical context
9	Medical expert, Communicator, Scholar	Able to draw conclusion justified by arguments raised

#1: The candidate demonstrates the ability to communicate clearly


The spelling, grammar or vocabulary significantly impedes communication.	0
The spelling, grammar and vocabulary are acceptable but the candidate demonstrates below average capacity for clear written expression.	1 2
The spelling, grammar and vocabulary are acceptable and the candidate demonstrates good capacity for written expression	3 4
The candidate displays a highly sophisticated level of written expression.	5

#2: The candidate demonstrates the ability to critically evaluate the statement/question




	Mark
The candidate takes the statement/questions completely at face value with no attempt to explore deeper or alternative meanings	0
One or more interpretations are made, but may be invalid, superficial or not capture the meaning of the statement/question	1 2
Candidate demonstrates an understanding of the statement/question's meaning at superficial as well as deeper or more abstract levels	3 4
One or more valid interpretations are offered that display depth and breadth of understanding around the statement/question as well as background knowledge	5

#3: The candidate is able to identify and develop a number of lines of argument that are relevant to the proposition.




	Mark
There is no evidence of logical argument or critical reasoning; points are random or unconnected, or simply listed	0
There is only a weak attempt at supporting the assertions made by correct and relevant knowledge OR there is only one argument OR the arguments are not well linked	1 2
The points in this essay follow logically to demonstrate the argument and are adequately developed	3 4
The candidate demonstrates a sophisticated level of reasoning and logical argument, and most or all the arguments are relevant	5

#4: Information cited in the essay is factually correct




	Mark
There are significant errors of fact that, if used as a basis for treatment planning, could pose a risk to patients	0
There are errors of fact that are multiple and substantial, but without the element of significant risk to patients	1 2
Assertions made are generally correct, with no major errors of fact	3 4
There are no major errors of fact and the level of relevant factual knowledge is higher than average (e.g. accurately quoted literature)	5

#5: ...mature understanding of broader models of health and illness, cultural sensitivity and the cultural context of psychiatry historically and in the present time, and the role of the psychiatrist as advocate




	Mark
The candidate limits themselves inappropriately rigidly to the medical model OR does not demonstrate cultural awareness or sensitivity where this was clearly required OR fails to demonstrate an appropriate awareness of a relevant cultural/historical context OR fails to consider a role for psychiatrist as advocate	0
... touches on the expected areas but their ideas lack depth or breadth or are inaccurate or irrelevant to the question/statement	1 2
... demonstrates an acceptable level of cultural sensitivity and/or historical context and/or broader models of health and illness and/or the role of psychiatrist as advocate relevant to the question/statement	3 4
The candidate demonstrates a superior level of awareness and knowledge in these areas relevant to the statement/question	5

#6: The candidate demonstrates appropriate ethical awareness




	Mark
The candidate fails to address ethical issues where this was clearly required, or produces material that is unethical in content	0
The candidate raises ethical issues that are not relevant or are simply listed without elaboration or are described incorrectly or so unclearly as to cloud the meaning	1 2
The candidate demonstrates an appropriate awareness of relevant ethical issues	3 4
The candidate demonstrates a superior level of knowledge or awareness of relevant ethical issues	5

#7: The candidate demonstrates understanding of patient-centred care, the recovery model in psychiatry, and the role of carers




	Mark
The candidate fails to consider patient-centred care, carers, and/or recovery principles where these are relevant OR merely mentions them.	0
The candidate mentions these concepts but does not demonstrate an accurate understanding of them or is unable to do so clearly.	1 2
The candidate demonstrates understanding of patient-centred care, the recovery model in psychiatry, and the role of carers	3 4
The candidate demonstrates a superior depth or breadth of understanding of patient-centred care, the recovery model in psychiatry, and the role of carers	5

#8: ... able to apply arguments and conclusions to the clinical context, and/or apply clinical experience in their arguments.




	Mark
Arguments and conclusions appear uninformed by clinical experience (no clinical link) or are contrary or inappropriate to the clinical context	0
There is an attempt to link to the clinical context, but it is tenuous or the links made are unrealistic	1 2
The candidate is able to apply the arguments and conclusions to the clinical context, and/or apply clinical experience in their arguments	3 4
The candidate makes links to the clinical context that appear very well-informed and show an above average level of insight	5

#9 The candidate is able to draw a conclusion that is justified by the arguments they have raised.



	Mark
There is no conclusion	0
Any conclusion is poorly justified or not supported by the arguments that have been raised	1 2
The candidate is able to draw a conclusion/s that is justified by the arguments they have raised	3 4
The candidate demonstrates an above average level of sophistication in the conclusion/s drawn, and they are well supported by the arguments raised.	5

#10: Specific to the essay under consideration (not to be >10% weighting)



	Mark
Not demonstrated	0
Weakly demonstrated	1 2
Adequately demonstrated	3 4
Demonstrated at a superior level	5

Example of weighting and domain choice



Domain		Weighting
1	Ability to communicate clearly	10%
2	Ability to critically evaluate statement/question	15%
3	Ability to develop a number of relevant lines of argument	20%
5	Understands broader models of health & illness; cultural context	20%
7	Understands & links patient-centred care, recovery model, carers	25%
9	Able to draw conclusion justified by arguments	10%

Guide to the Critical Essay question 2017



So what is a critical essay?

The Critical Essay in the RANZCP



'In essay form, critically discuss this statement from different points of view and provide your conclusion.'

The Critical Essay in the RANZCP



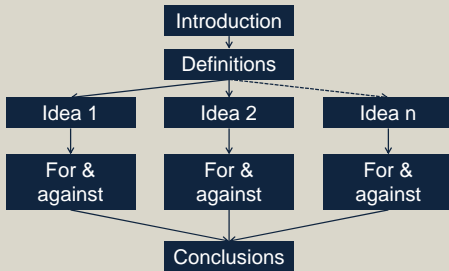
- In common with other types of academic essay it has an introduction, a body and a conclusion
- It is a concisely written, structured consideration of a proposition
- In the RANZCP, this may include arguments for and against the proposition but also a *discussion of its meaning*
- It particularly looks for *different points of view*
- The arguments must flow logically to the conclusion
- It must deliver on the criteria against which it is being assessed (as per previous section)

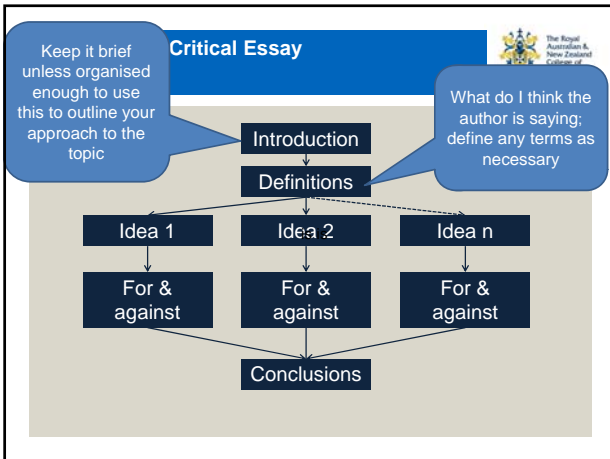
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICE?



- No set formula
- But generally expected that you:
 - argue for or against the quote (or a bit of both)
 - Or outline a proposition that bears some clear relationship to the quote and argue it

Anatomy of a Critical Essay





- STRATEGY**
- Think beyond your point of view as a doctor firmly entrenched in the medical model
 - Consider what the views in the community might be...what the views of other cultures might be
 - Consider your broader reading – can you quote any studies?
 - Think generic AND specific; give examples to illustrate and justify your points
 - Your arguments MUST be supported by 'relevant and correct knowledge'

Descriptive vs Critical writing

Descriptive	Critical
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reports ideas but does not appraise their merit• Does not add any new ideas• Relatively low level skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is a form of active participation in an academic debate• Weighs the evidence and arguments of others & contributes your own• High level skill

FAQS



- Can I just come up with a statement of my own on the topic and argue it?
- Can I just say why I agree/don't agree with the statement?
- Do I need to include references for what I say?

An approach to the CEQ



- Make sure you have a look at the topic in the reading time – this will start your subconscious working
- Once you start to write, allocate 5 minutes to planning
- Begin the planning process by simply writing down everything that comes into your mind when you read the quote

An approach to the CEQ (2)



- Think about other ways in which the proposition might be interpreted or viewed, especially from perspectives outside the medical model
- Ensure you consider pros and cons of the proposition: even if you agree/disagree you should argue why you reject the other point of view

An approach to the CEQ (3)



- Have a look at your list of thoughts – are any themes emerging? Do any of your thoughts naturally group together?
- By this stage you should be developing some sense of what your own opinion/s might be regarding the proposition – this will form your conclusions

An approach to the CEQ (4)



- Begin writing with an **introduction**. This should include:
 - How you have interpreted the proposition i.e. what do you believe is the author's position or argument?
 - The context (if you know it) in which the argument was developed or to which it is intended to apply; what journal is it in and what does this tell you? What was the title of the whole article and what does this suggest?
 - Any relevant definitions

An approach to the CEQ (5)



- Choose some of your best ideas – '*best*' because they:
 - cover areas that you know a lot about (and can therefore quote evidence)
 - are novel or demonstrate your ability to consider a range of perspectives
 - seem particularly important or relevant

An approach to the CEQ (6)



- You **MUST** be able to show why the ideas you've chosen to use are relevant to the proposition
- Your arguments **MUST** lead in an understandable way to the conclusion/s you ultimately draw.

Your position



- Whether you agree or disagree with the proposition you **MUST** justify your conclusions
- You can partially agree – again, you need to justify this position
- You can propose an entirely different viewpoint – as long as you can justify it

YOUR CONCLUSION



- You need a conclusion!!!

Tips



- The best essays consider pros and cons/ evidence for and against both the author's contention AND your own ideas
 - *"On the one hand ... but on the other hand ..."*
 - *"In support of this ... but against this ..."*
- Clearly, if you ultimately disagree with the author, then your arguments against the proposition should be strong!

Tips



- You must demonstrate an academic style:
 - Avoid emotional arguments (and you can be critical of these if they are the author's main support for their own argument)
 - You must be able to justify your own assertions

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Time to practice ...

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Practice Exercises

1. Using Sample Q.1, choose domains for marking & weight the domains:
 - a) spend 5 minutes planning the essay yourself
 - b) choose relevant domains
2. Mark two essay papers
3. Attempt an essay question

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Sample question

“Cognitive psychologists have shown us how our intuition can be fooled. We can be gullible. Critical thinking is required to avoid common fallacies. Metacognition can help us monitor our thinking and avoid mistakes.”

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