University and Academic Terms Crib Sheet

Section 1: General Academic Terms around Study or Assessment

Disclaimer: The aim of these resources is to ease the transition for international students into UK higher education and to bring clarity to some of the terminology that is used in this institution. However, the aim is not to imply that UK higher education is the 'correct' way to conduct education, that international students should feel the need to 'assimilate', or that international students are necessarily all in need of such. This is simply a practical tool that may be useful for some students to help navigate the UK system.

Newcastle University | Institute for Social Science

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Interdisciplinary

Interdisciplinary refers to the combination of multiple academic disciplines into one; involving two or more academic disciplines.

Transdisciplinary

Transdisciplinary relates to collaboration that spans more than one branch of knowledge. Transdisciplinary collaboration occurs when people with diverse disciplinary expertise work together.

Multidisciplinary

Multidisciplinary involves the combination of several academic disciplines. This can range from broad fields like science and history used together to more specialized combinations such as linguistics and archaeology or professional specializations addressing a specific topic or problem. It entails utilizing different disciplines to solve a single problem.

Note: It is important to note that these terms are not always used in a strict or standardised way, and their meanings can vary in different contexts. Additionally, the distinctions between them are not always clear-cut, and there may be overlap in their usage.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the concept where an individual's beliefs, biases, or actions can influence and potentially distort their perception of reality. It encompasses two main dimensions: first, it acknowledges the impact of personal beliefs on their research, and second, it recognises that individual actions can affect and alter social structures. This idea suggests that subjective views can impact objective conditions, challenging the notion of purely objective observations and emphasising the interplay between subjectivity and reality.

Critical Analysis

Critical Analysis involves the examination of available facts, evidence, observations, and arguments to form a judgment through rational, sceptical, and unbiased analysis and evaluation. In simpler terms, it means using facts and evidence to explore an issue or topic and arriving at a conclusion. Critical analysis focuses on understanding how and why something has happened, rather than merely describing what happened. By doing so, you will then arrive at a conclusion on that topic. The conclusion can vary widely based on what the subject is. A broad example would be: 'by studying opinion polls and participant interviews, I can make conclusions on why the studied group feels the way they do about a certain topic'. Critical analysis is the process if trying to answer how and why something has happened, not what has happened (which is just description).

Critical Engagement

Critical Engagement refers to an approach to reading and data where you do not passively accept what is being said. Instead, you assess the evidence and arguments presented by scholars. This assessment includes determining the reliability of evidence and critically evaluating the persuasiveness of their arguments. Is their evidence reliable? Why/why not? This does not just apply for evidence, but arguments in general. For example, if the scholar is making an ethical argument, do you feel they have a point? Why do you think that? How have they convinced you? By approaching work in this manner, you will begin practicing critical engagement. In short, it is about not trusting someone's work without a reason.

Critical Evaluation

Critical Evaluation involves weighing the strengths and weaknesses of an argument. This term signifies appraising or assessing the worth of something, testing the assumptions of scholars and your own, and judging the value of an argument or position. Some guiding questions: Does it make sense? Does it help you to better understand the topic it addresses?

It includes assessing whether an argument makes sense, enhances your understanding of the topic, and considers the reliability of the evidence and data used. Some guiding questions: Is the evidence/data they are using reliable? Have they considered this question themselves? Do they talk about it in relation to their argument?

Criticality

Criticality means being meticulous and thoughtful when evaluating or judging something. It entails not accepting things at face value and instead examining them closely with a questioning attitude. Personal experiences can influence our research; thus, criticality involves adopting a rigorous and thoughtful mindset for understanding and evaluating information.

Knowledge Generation

Knowledge Generation simply means acquiring new knowledge and understanding it. This involves actively seeking, learning, and applying new information to foster the growth of knowledge in a specific subject or field. Knowledge Generation emphasizes not only knowing facts but also understanding the significance of these facts and the principles behind them.

Conceptual Framework

In different contexts, the term “Conceptual Framework” can have specific meanings:

Research and Academia: In research, a conceptual framework is often presented as a visual or written map that outlines the key concepts, variables, and relationships under investigation.

This is a tool you can use in analysis. It can be used in various ways. It can be a representation of the relationship you expect to see between your variables; it can be used to define a research question (what you want to learn) and define how wide an area your research will cover and what resources you will include and use; it can also refer to one or more theories as well as other concepts and from the literature used in research.

Ethical Dimension

All studies deemed high-risk that involve people as participants require a review by a research ethics committee (REC). The principal investigator (or the lead researcher on the study) is responsible for seeking this review. RECs exist to protect the rights, safety, dignity, and wellbeing of research participants.

Assessment Language Examples

The nature of the enquiry underpinning the study is fully articulated, with a strong rationale provided through critical engagement with research methods literature (including the ethical dimension).

In this example, it means that the study's research question and its rationale are clearly defined, and the choice of literature and research methods is justified, with consideration for ethical issues. The type of question or research that the study is built from are clear, and the reasons for addressing this question, or using this type of research, are well explained. In this explanation, the researcher has justified and explained why they have used certain literature and research methods. They have tried to examine the ethical issues involved in their study.

Excellent understanding of chosen topic, with a very high level of critical reflection.

This indicates a strong grasp of the chosen topic, the expression of personal thoughts and feelings, and justification of their impact on the study's results.

They have shown they understand the chosen topic and they have outlined their own thoughts and feelings in relation to it. In this outline of their own thoughts, they have justified why they thought as they did, and how their perspective might have impacted the results of their study.

Coherence & Criticality (coherence of arguments; supporting evidence; critical approach)

Coherence refers to the clarity and logical structure of arguments (how clear your argument is. This includes how clear your writing is, but also if you have structured your argument in a way that makes sense to the reader, and therefore is easy to follow.)

Criticality relates to the critical approach used to evaluate the arguments and supporting evidence. For 'Criticality' see the dedicated definition.

Evidence of an excellent level of analysis, critical evaluation and synthesis of the literature.

This means demonstrating consistent analysis, critical thinking, and the integration of information from various sources. You have shown a constant use of **analysis** (*analysis means closely examining something to understand it better. It involves looking at the details and parts of a subject to figure out how they work and what they mean. What is the subject's significance to other things surrounding it*?), thinking **critically** *(see 'Criticality'),* and combining information from different sources.

Purely descriptive summary of the literature.

This indicates a lack of analysis and critical thinking, with the presentation focusing solely on describing the content of the literature without deeper evaluation or interpretation.

If you receive this comment, it means you have not included analysis or critical thought. You have simply described the literature by telling the marker what each book includes.

Note: For more detailed information about "what critical thinking is and various ways to develop a critical mindset and apply it in your studies", please kindly refer to the webpage on Academic Skills Kit Newcastle University.

Link: https://www.ncl.ac.uk/academic-skills-kit/study-skills/critical-thinking/

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