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EJA Editorial Team

BUILDING CRITICAL THINKING INTO YOUR WRITING



AUSTRALIAN EVALUATION SOCIETY

QUALITY EVALUATION
THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Acknowledgement of Country.



Introductions: Editorial Team



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Journal Strategic Update

- Aim of the Journal
- Where have we come from?
- Where are we going?
- The demand for quality, academic scholarship
- The Journal of choice for evaluators in our region

“The purpose of the *Evaluation Journal of Australasia* (known as *EJA*) is to further the aims of the AES in promoting the theory, research and practice of evaluation”.

Quality measures

Issues	4 per year	12 articles, 4 evaluator perspectives, 4 book reviews
Rankings	2025	2021
Downloads	↑ 40,001	19,225
Cite Score	↑ 2.1	1.2
Scimago	↑ Q2	Q3

Article types

Academic article (3000-8000 words)

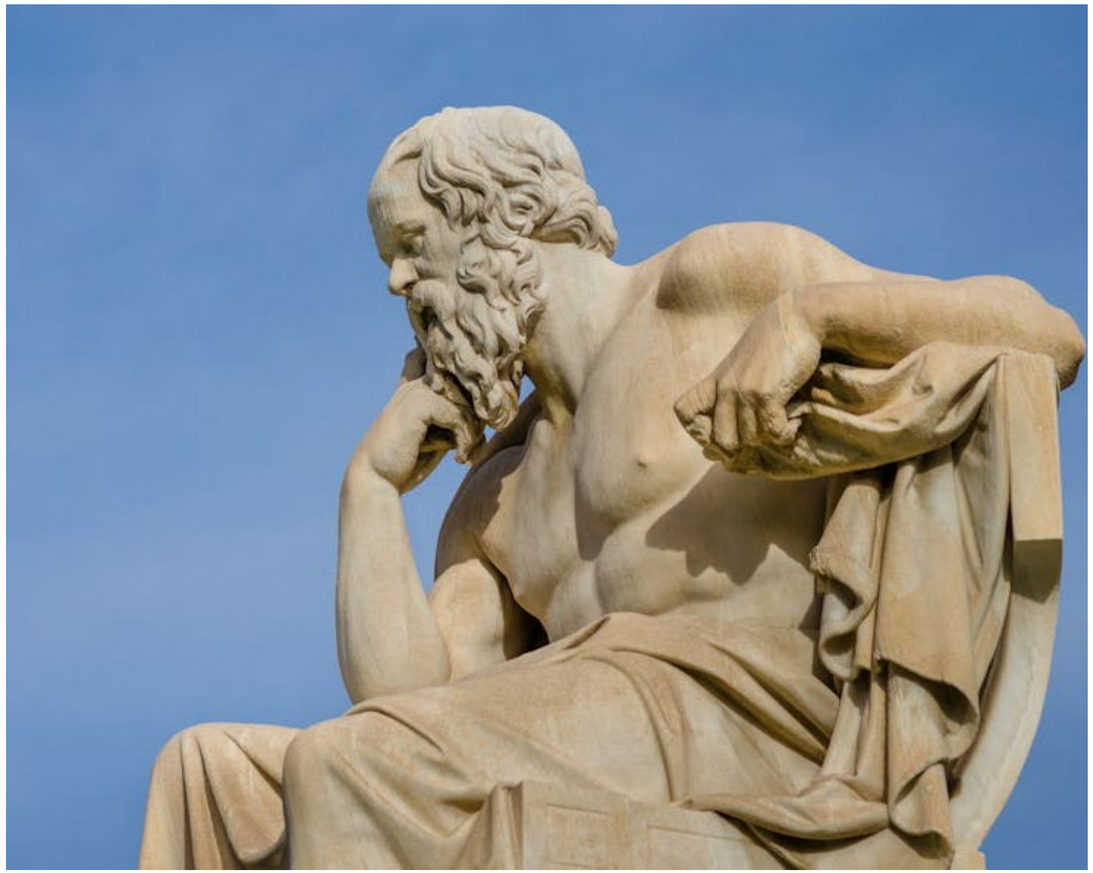
- theory or philosophy based and/or draws on empirical findings
- contributes to the literature within evaluative thinking and practice

Review article (up to 8000 words)

- describe current topics and provide a balanced account of prior research
- a range of review types (e.g., scoping, systematic, meta-analysis)

Practice article (3000-5000 words)

- applies an evaluation theory, describes the evaluation and presents the findings of a program/project
- innovative methods or practice welcome



Aim of session

What is critical thinking?

How do you write critically?

What about AI and critical thinking?

What is critical thinking?

Defining critical thinking

"Critical thinking demands questioning assumptions; acknowledging and dealing with preconceptions, predilections, and biases; diligently looking for negative and disconfirming cases that don't fit the dominant pattern; conscientiously examining rival explanations; relentlessly seeking diverse perspectives; and analyzing what and how you think, why you think that way, and the implications for your inquiry."

Patton, MQ. 2015, Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice (p. 702). SAGE Publications. Kindle Edition.

"Critical thinking is the process of testing the accuracy and reliability of the information to confirm its true value and judging information based on the balance of probabilities."
Cole, M (2023), Evaluative thinking. EJA *23*(2), 70-90, p. 78

"…concept clarification, fact-claim verification, and argument/inference validation…". Roth, Robin, and Doug Borcoman (2015). *The Importance of Critical Thinking in Writing*, Momentum Press,.

"Critical thinking is skilled and active interpretation and evaluation of observations and communications, information and argumentation".
isher and Scriven,(1997) *Critical Thinking: Its Definition and Assessment*. Edgepress and Centre for Research in Critical Thinking, University of East Anglia, p. 21.)

In simple terms, critical thinking involves

- Reasoning and logic
- Argument
- Questioning and testing assumptions
- Validation
- Analysis and synthesis of evidence
- Interpretation, recognising bias and applying creativity
- Inferences and deductions, making judgements
- Evaluation propositions and counterpropositions
- Recognising ethical issues

Critical thinking is not

- A good sales pitch
- Criticism (finding fault)
- Proving a point
- Support for a particular position

How do I write critically?

Writing from an evaluation project

Questioning: What was the logic of the program? Was it correct? How could it be improved? What was the reasoning behind the logic?
Arguing: What is the rational (logical, reasoned) case for your judgements about the program? Is it deductive? Is it inductive? Or both?
Analysing: What evidence is there both for and against outcomes or recommendations? What's missing from the data? What did you not expect to find?
Validating: How does what people think align with what they do? What evidence might be required to validate perceptions?
Interpreting: How might different groups of people interpret findings? Am I biased? Is the commissioner biased or predisposed to particular findings?

Writing a literature review

Questioning: What questions am I seeking to answer from the literature? Am I trying to justify a particular position or am I open to exploring alternative positions?
Reasoning: While the data may tell one story, what other stories might explain outcomes, or point to alternative recommendations?
Testing assumptions: What assumptions do I make as I read the literature? What assumptions does the literature make? How does my positionality influence my reading?
Arguing: Am I building an argument from the literature? What are the arguments premised on? Are there theoretical perspectives that may offer alternative arguments?
Interpreting: How does the literature inform an understanding of my findings? Does it offer explanations that are not evident in the data? What's missing from the literature?

Developing a methodology

Assumptions: What is the philosophical basis for your methods? Epistemology? Axiology? Ontology?
Questioning: Are the evaluation questions right? Can they be answered?
Validating: How do I ensure that the data I use reflects truth for all stakeholders?
Analysing evidence: Do my methods give me enough to make valid or fair judgments? What might be missing in terms of data, sample, design? How appropriate are the indicators employed? Could they be improved?
Ethics: Have I identified ethical issues that arise from my work?
Interpreting: What are the limitations of my study? What is out of scope? What can't I say based on the methods employed?

Writing discussions and conclusions

Questioning: Have I provided an answer to the evaluation questions? What have I been unable to answer? Was the methodology/design appropriate?
Arguing: Is the argument for recommendations defensible? How so? How might different stakeholders view these recommendations?
Synthesising: What claims can I make from the combined evidence? What reasoning/premises can I give for claims? How might I generalise from my findings?
Validating: If there are gaps in the evidence, how might they be filled? Can I offer an alternative theory of change? What's new in this?
Judging: On what basis are your judgments of the program made? Does your positionality influence your judgment?

Moving from descriptive to critical

From	To
Literature used to support a position, presents a dump of information	Literature that recognises complexity and builds an argument and answers questions
Simplistic presentation of findings	Presentation of what was found and what wasn’t found
Presentation of simple logic models	Presentation of models that demonstrate a plausible and defensible causal pathway for change
Presentation of methods	Methodology and design that unpacks ethical, positionality, limitations, risks and costs
Presentation of recommendations/implications	Responding to EQs, pros and cons and choices arising from data

Examples of critical thinking in articles

Wanzer, D. L. (2021). What Is Evaluation?: Perspectives of How Evaluation Differs (or Not) From Research. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *42*(1), 28-46. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214020920710

AES members can access this by logging in to the AES member portal.

Chilisa, B. M. (2024). Embedding evaluation theory on African philosophies: An asset to evaluation transformation. *12(2), 735.* https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v12i2.735

What about AI?

- **Does AI kill critical thinking?**
- **How might AI be used to enhance critical thinking?**
- **What kind of genAI is acceptable in a paper?**

SAGE AI Policies

“Sage recognizes that large language models (LLMs) or Gen AI offer opportunities for acceleration in research and its dissemination. While these opportunities can be transformative, they are unable to replicate human creative and critical thinking. ”

AI assistance (no disclosure required)
AI generated (disclosure required)
Prohibited use of AI



Caption of photo

Q&A

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