Critical Writing Worksheet

1. Critical or Descriptive?
Indicate whether the following are characteristics of critical writing (C) or descriptive writing (D).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Critical (C) or Descriptive (D)?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lists the main elements of a theory</td>
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<td>Evaluates information and draws conclusions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Makes reasoned judgements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outlines how something works</td>
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<tr>
<td>States options</td>
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<td>Identifies the significance</td>
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2. An example of critical writing
Read the following extract, adapted from the introduction section of a journal article. Don’t worry about understanding every word – this exercise is to help you to pick out different views within an argument.

Highlight examples where the authors present contrasting views.

While the medical community generally considers depression to be an uncontested, routinely diagnosed condition, and antidepressants a safe and effective treatment, controversies about the diagnosis and treatment abound. Some argue that physicians fail to distinguish between normal sadness and major depressive disorder (e.g., Horwitz & Wakefield 2007; Wilson 2008). Also, since they rarely use the DSM to aid in the diagnosis (Thomas-MacLean et al. 2005), what is being diagnosed as depression is sometimes unclear. Parker (2007) stated that the reliability of the DSM criteria for depression and the threshold for reaching a diagnosis of depression are low; consequently, even with the use of the DSM criteria, normal emotional states are diagnosed as clinical depression. Others have heavily criticized psychiatry and the pharmaceutical industry for creating and extending the diagnostic category of depression (e.g., Greenburg 2010; Healy 1997; Shorter 1997; Valenstein 1988).
The diagnosis of depression is closely tied to its principal treatment, antidepressant medication, which is the subject of controversy with the recent attention to the publication bias of clinical trial data. Turner et al. (2008) acquired antidepressant clinical trial results from the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and found that about a third of the studies were not published and that the FDA considered the vast majority of these unpublished studies to have negative results (i.e., failing to demonstrate efficacy). In contrast, studies with positive results were almost always published. When Kirsch et al. (2008) used meta-analytic techniques that included unpublished antidepressant trials, they reported that the placebo effect accounted for 82% of the improvement seen with antidepressant drugs, which led them to conclude that “there seems little evidence to support the prescription of antidepressant medication to any but the most severely depressed patients, unless alternative treatments have failed to provide benefit” (p. 266).

Clearly, the diagnosis of depression and the use of antidepressants are contested domains in the academic literature. In addition, laypersons are exposed to these debates through public media such as newspapers. For example, a recent article published in a Canadian national newspaper with the headline “Is Depression a Disease?” (McLaren 2010) drew attention to the work of Greenburg (2010) and his contention that depression is a creation of the pharmaceutical industry in order to sell a remedy. The increasingly public nature of the controversies over diagnosing and treating depression provided the impetus for the present study.

Thinking about the WEED model, is this a good example of a paragraph, and why?

Professional practice is more complex than simply applying theory to practice, since it involves a professional juggling of situational demands, intuition, experiences and knowledge (Schön, 1991). Practitioners do not apply research findings in a simple deductive process; they need time to think, translate and relate the research findings to their particular setting. Successful implementation of evidence-based practice occurs when the evidence is robust, the context is receptive to change and there is appropriate monitoring, strong leadership and facilitation of the change (Harvey et al., 2002). Timing is important to the perception of relevance and to professional involvement and engagement with research. The extent to which a given piece of evidence is utilised by an individual in practice depends on their sense of the situation and this inevitably involves professional judgement.

4. Improving a critical paragraph
Read the following paragraph

A healthy lifestyle brings many benefits. It results in a reduced risk of mortality (Loef and Walach, 2012) and it can lead to a healthier more independent old age (Södergren, 2013). The major modifiable risks for cardiovascular disease relate to a person’s lifestyle (Jørgensen et al, 2013). A healthy lifestyle is created by a combination of several factors: not being obese, low alcohol consumption, non-smoking, a good diet, and physical activity. A combination of at least four healthy lifestyle factors is associated with a reduction of the all cause mortality risk by 66% (Loef and Walach, 2012).

What is good about it?

What are its limitations?

How could you make it more critical?