

Critical incident analysis



What to do when something happens that makes you question your teaching approach.

Critical incident analysis is good for:

- Reflecting when something significantly positive or negative happens in your classroom to help you replicate it or avoid it happening again.



PREPARATION:

Identify a critical incident and make a note to follow up shortly after.



TIMING:

Spend 30-60 minutes after a class, best to do as soon as you can after the session.



PEOPLE:

Discussing a critical incident with a colleague can also aid in reflection.

1

INTRODUCTION

What is a critical incident?

A critical incident need not be a dramatic event: usually it is an incident which has significance for you. It is an event which made you stop and think. It may have made you question an aspect of your approach. It is an incident which in some way has had a significant impact on your teaching, and can be either positive (e.g. students perform better than expected) or negative (e.g. class doesn't meet learning outcomes).

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ACT

Develop an action plan to tackle any issues raised. An example plan should address:

What am I going to do?

- **How** will I make this happen?
- **What** obstacles exist?
- **How** will I know I've done it?
- **When** will I review my progress?

2

ANALYSE WHAT HAPPENED

Grab some paper and write 50-100 words against each of the following questions:

- **Why** do I view the situation like that?
- **What** assumptions have I made about the students or situation?
- **How** else could I interpret the situation?
- **What** other action could I have taken that might have been more helpful?

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SHARE WIDELY (OPTIONAL)

Tackling critical incidents in this way often leads to profound improvements in practice for teachers. With this in mind, once you've successfully acted, consider sharing with colleagues—either in informal chats over coffee or in a teaching and learning seminar—how you've replicated or improved a situation and what you learned from the process.

3

SHARE

Use the elements you've written in **2** for a starting point to discuss the incident with a mentor or trusted colleague. Is this something they've noticed too, either with their own students or if they've peer observed you in your teaching?

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EVIDENCE

Structured self-reflection as described will enhance your practice and your students' satisfaction and outcomes (captured by MEQs and assessments respectively). Use this as evidence when developing an application for **HEA Fellowship** or as part of the narrative in your case for **promotion**.

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REPETITION

Most critical events are one-offs, but their effects stay with us. Consider if there is anything you could do in class to make the event happen again (if it had a positive outcome) or to stop it from happening again (if it had a negative outcome). Or do you think this situation was really a one-off? If not go to **5**

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FURTHER INFORMATION

