Critical incident analysis

What to do when something happens that makes you stop and think about 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, or as soon as you can after the session.

**PEOPLE:**
Discussing a critical incident with a colleague can also aid in reflection.
## Introduction

**Identify a critical incident.** It need not be a dramatic event: usually it is simply an incident with significance for you. It is an event that made you stop and think. It may have made you question an aspect of your approach. It is an incident that has had an impact on your teaching, either positive (e.g. students perform better than expected) or negative (e.g. class doesn’t meet outcomes).

## 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?

## Share

Use the elements you’ve written as 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 have peer observed you in your teaching?

## 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?

## Act

Develop a plan to tackle 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?

## Share widely (optional)

Tackling critical incidents in this way can lead to profound improvements in practice. 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.

## Evidence

Describe the incident and use your analysis, action plan and resulting outcomes as the basis for evidencing the impact of your reflection on your practice.

## Further information

[www.dur.ac.uk/dcad/forstaff/evaluation/](www.dur.ac.uk/dcad/forstaff/evaluation/)