

# Read critically

Critical reading is a more **active** way of reading. It is a deeper and more complex engagement with a text. Critical reading is a process of analyzing, interpreting and, sometimes, evaluating the larger meanings of a text and how those meanings are created by the text. When we read critically, we use our critical thinking skills to **question** both the text and our own reading of it.

## What is the difference between reading and critical reading?

	Reading	Critical reading
<b>Purpose</b>	To get a basic grasp of the text	To form judgments about how a text works
<b>Activity</b>	Absorbing/Understanding	Analyzing/Interpreting/Evaluating
<b>Focus</b>	What a text says	What a text does and means?
<b>Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the text saying?</li> <li>• What information can I get out of it?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the text work? How is it argued?</li> <li>• What are the choices made? The patterns that result?</li> <li>• What kinds of reasoning and evidence are used?</li> <li>• What are the underlying assumptions/perspectives?</li> <li>• What does the text mean? Is the text effective?</li> <li>• How can I use it to develop my own argument?</li> </ul>
<b>Direction</b>	With the text (taking for granted it is right)	Against the text (questioning its assumptions and argument, interpreting meaning in context)
<b>Response</b>	Restatement, Summary	Description, Interpretation, Evaluation

## What needs to be done to prepare for critical reading?

There are two steps to preparing to read critically:

1. **Self-Reflect:** What are your feelings about the topic? What experiences, assumptions, knowledge, and perspectives do you bring to the text? What biases might you have? Are you able to keep an open mind and consider other points of view?
2. **Read to Understand:** (a) Examine the text and context: Who is the author? Who is the publisher? Where and when was it written? What kind of text is it? What kinds of sources are referenced? (b) Skim the text: What is the topic? What is the main idea? What are the most important points? (c) Resolve confusion: Look up unfamiliar words or terms in dictionaries or glossaries. Go over difficult passages to clarify them.

## What is the process for reading critically?

To read critically, you must think critically. What does this mean? Critical thinking involves several related mental processes: analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. Each of these thinking processes helps you to question the text in different ways. The questions you ask will depend on the type of text you are reading, and general questions should lead to more specific questions.

1. **Analysis Asks: What are the patterns of the text?** Analysis means looking at the parts of something to detect patterns. If you were a detective, this is when you would gather all your clues to see how they might relate to each other. In reading a scholarly journal, for example, you look at three main parts of the text:
  - a. Choice of Content: what ideas and examples have been selected?
  - b. Choice of Language: what words and sentence structures have been selected?
  - c. Choice of Structure: what arrangement has been selected to present the ideas in?

Some guiding questions related to analysis include:

- What is the thesis or main idea?
- What are the supporting points that create the argument? How do they relate to each other? How do they relate to the thesis?
- What are the examples used as evidence for the supporting points? How do they relate to the points they support? To each other? To the thesis?
- What techniques of persuasion are used (appeals to emotion, reason, authority, etc.)?
- What rhetorical strategies (definition, explanation, description, narration, elaboration, argumentation, evaluation) and modes (illustration, comparison/contrast, cause and effect, process analysis, classification/division, definition) are used?

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- In what order are the points presented (chronological, spatial, from general to specific, from similarity to difference, from cause to effect, from reason to conclusion)?
- What sources are used? What other theorists or researchers are referred to? What schools of thought are relied upon? Analysis enables you to understand how the text works so that you can then interpret its deeper meanings and evaluate its meanings and effectiveness.

2. **Interpretation Asks: What do the patterns of the argument mean?** Interpretation is reading ideas as well as sentences. It is when you look at the patterns in a text and make inferences (educated guesses) about its underlying meanings. It can be compared to being a detective interpreting the patterns of clues in order to theorize about whom the possible suspects are and why the crime might have been committed. Question the text within its context. The more knowledge you have of the context of your discipline, the stronger your powers of interpretation, and thus evaluation.

Some guiding questions related to interpretation include:

- What kinds of reasoning (historical, psychological, political, philosophical, scientific) are used?
- What methodology or theoretical approach is used?
- What are the implicit assumptions?
- What is the point of view, or perspective, like?
- What alternative perspectives remain unconsidered?
- How might my reading of the text be biased?

3. **Evaluation Asks: How well does the text do what it does? What is its value?** Evaluation is making judgments about a text. If you were a detective, this is when you would run with one educated guess and build a case for or against a suspect's credibility.

Some guiding questions related to evaluation include:

- Is the thesis strong?
- Are the points argued well?
- Are the examples valid?
- Are the sources reliable?
- Is the argument logically consistent? Convincing?
- Does the argument contribute to the discipline?

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