Reading Critically

Critical reading is learning to differentiate between facts and interpretations. Critical reading requires a lot of interaction with the text. It might seem like a lot of work in the beginning, but once you learn the methods, it will become a natural thinking process. We have listed some helpful tools to get you started on critical reading.

Becoming Familiar With My Textbook or Anthology

First, familiarize yourself with the textbook and its format. Do this before you start any reading.

Text Organization

Look for the preface, table of contents, appendix, bibliography, glossary, and index. Skim through them.

Chapter Organization

Within the chapter, notice the introduction, major and minor headings, punctuation, and summaries.

Make note of the different fonts and print type the author uses to direct your attention to important ideas. Pay attention to headings, as well as bolded, underlined, or italicized words.

Finding Interest on Material

Become interested in the material. Find something interesting in the textbook you can relate to. You will always learn more when reading of a subject that interests you.

Understanding What You Are Reading

Skimming

You don’t need to know all the details when you are skimming, but it’s a good way to get a glimpse of the big picture by asking yourself: “who, what, when, where” is the text talking about.

Read the introduction, major and minor headings, punctuation, and summaries. How is the vocabulary presented?

Glance over the tables, graphs, and pictures in that chapter before you begin reading.
**Reading**

A good way to make sure you pick up the important points in a section is to turn the heading and subheadings within the chapter into **questions**. As you are reading, look for the answers to your questions. This will also help you focus on the important concepts.

**Annotate.** Writing marginal notes and highlighting are a good ways to keep focus on the important points. Any inferences and questions that occur to you should be written down, as they will later help you interpret the information you have just read. You can draw your own conclusions on the data presented to you, or question it if you think the author was being biased.

**Look up words** and make a vocabulary list of the new words you are learning. It is always easiest to learn words within context, so make sure to not only list these words but also the sentences they are presented in. The next time you hear or read that word, you will think back to this context and remember the meaning.

Use **context clues**. Sometimes you don’t even have to look up a word; the context in which it appears can give you all the clues you need to understand its meaning.

Write **summaries**. After each section or chapter, write a 2-3 sentence summary of the key points the author made. This is a great tool you can use later when you are studying for a test or writing an essay.

Take notes of reoccurring images or themes, and consider various points of view.

Read twice. Make sure that you understand the difference between facts and the author’s interpretation.

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**Seven Strategies for Reading Difficult Material**

1. Read the title and the first paragraph.
   a. Do you have enough background to begin reading?
   b. Do you need to read from another source? Sometimes the style of writing will confuse the reader; if this happens, be sure to make use of other sources available to you, such as online articles.

2. Look for main ideas.
   a. Pay close attention to titles, headings and subheadings. Read the topic sentences and look over graphs, charts and diagrams.

3. Look up words.
   a. It is imperative that you understand what you are reading. Use your thesaurus.

4. Monitor your comprehension.
   a. Periodically ask yourself what you have learned. Make sure you have a clear understanding of the material.

5. Reread.
a. If you haven’t completely understood the main ideas, go back and reread. Restate difficult ideas in your own words.

6. Read to the end.
   a. Ideas can become clearer the more you read since you are accumulating more background information. Do not get discouraged and stop reading.

7. Write while you read.
   a. Underline, make notes, and write summaries that help you concentrate while reading.
   b. Interact with the author. Ask yourself whether you agree or disagree with their viewpoint.

**Benefits of Underlining and Highlighting**

It is imperative that you highlight or underline a section only after you have read it. Many times you will find that the section you highlighted was not as important as you first thought.

Focus on important ideas within each section. The words and sentences that answered your heading question are important; highlight those.

Do not highlight an entire section; it will confuse you.

It is also a good idea to highlight key words.

When reviewing, you will find that highlighting will save you time, since your eyes will focus on the main points and ideas only.

Underlining is also a good technique. Underline phrases that you think are of some importance. Good examples, even pictures or graphs, that aid you in understanding the material better should be underlined or marked.

**Remembering What You Read**

**VISUALIZATION:** Picture in your mind what you wish to remember. For example, remembers a definition by visualizing an experiment that supports the definition.

**REPETITION:** Recap important points and associate details to these points. Burn details into your mind.

Periodically review your marginal notes, answers to heading and subheading questions, vocabulary, and other information you highlighted.