

Critical Reading

To read effectively, one must go beyond an understanding of the author's stated main ideas and details. Reading critically involves making inferences, understanding the author's purpose, distinguishing arguments from facts and asking questions about the text.

Critical Reading Skills – As Outlined in *Keys to College Success*

1) *Making inferences (Lenier and Maker 1998, 49)*

- Involves drawing conclusions based on the author's statements, analyzing concepts by asking questions of the text, applying what has been read to new situations, and understanding the author's main ideas or themes.
- Sometimes main ideas are implied by the author and not directly stated:
 - E.g., "The hot sun drained the workers within hours. The constant buzz of malaria-carrying mosquitoes made life miserable. Poisonous snakes were a constant danger. The jungle grew back almost as fast as the men could clear it. Many men died and had to be replaced."
 - Implied Main Idea: "The conditions were difficult."

2) *Understanding the author's purpose*

- To inform the reader (Maimon, Peritz and Rubens 2003, 148):
 - Consider the reliability of a text based on the writer's credentials, the publisher, whether there is a works cited or consulted list;
 - Consider the relevance of a text based on the publication date and how the information relates to your task.
- To persuade the reader (Lenier and Maker 1998, 52):
 - Look for the presence of biases in the work;
 - Look for persuasive techniques, such as opinion presented as fact, sources of doubtful credibility, and propaganda techniques.
 - Also, an author's language can be used to influence a reader:
 - flexible and open-minded versus wimp;
 - strong and decisive versus rigid and narrow-minded.

3) *Distinguishing arguments from facts (Lenier and Maker 1998, 52)*

- Facts can be proven or disproven.
- Arguments differ from one author to another and should be supported by evidence, analysis, and examples.
- Some authors attempt to present their ideas as facts; therefore, it is important to evaluate the evidence:
 - Is the evidence convincing?
 - Are there any questionable assertions?

Adler and Van Doren's Four Questions to Ask When Reading Critically (Ellis 204)

1) *What is the writing about as a whole?*

- Explain the main idea or basic theme in one sentence.
- Outline major and minor topics covered.

2) *What is being said in detail?*

- Identify main terms, assertions and arguments.
- Describe the problems the writer is attempting to solve.

3) *Is it true?*

- Consider the logic and evidence presented.
- Is there any missing or faulty information, incomplete analysis or error in reasoning?
- Was the author successful in solving the identified problems? Is there anything that is still unresolved?

4) *What of it?*

- How relevant are the ideas?
- You may find that you change your thinking about an issue or your behaviour as a result of new information.

References

- Ellis, D. (2003). *Becoming a master student*. 10th ed. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company.
- Lenier, M. & Maker, J. (1998). *Keys to college success*. 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Maimon, E. P., Peritz, J. H., & Rubens, M. (2003). *A writer's resource: A handbook for writing and research*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson.