

# Critical Reading

Critical reading skills enable you to read effectively and efficiently by helping you to interpret more specifically what an author is saying.

## What is critical reading?

Critical reading is actually a two-step process: reading for understanding and analyzing what you have read. When you are asked to evaluate a piece of writing, you must first be sure that you clearly understand what you have read. The judgments and interpretations you make of the texts you read are the first steps towards formulating your own approach.

## Practical tips:

1. Begin your reading by skimming the material. You do that by reading the introduction, summary, conclusions, headings, etc.
2. Determine the purpose of the text. What the author is trying to say, what is the purpose of the article, book, etc.
3. Make judgments about the context. Who is the intended audience of the text? Is the author biased in any way?
4. Examine the evidence. What evidence is given for statements, opinions, etc. Analyze the evidence.

## Critically analyzing Information Sources

You can begin evaluating a physical information source (a book or an article for instance) even before you have the physical item in hand. Appraise a source by first examining the bibliographic citation. The bibliographic citation is the written description of a book, journal article, essay or some published material that appears in a catalog or index. Bibliographic citations characteristically have three main components: author, title and publication information. These components can help you determine the usefulness of this source paper.

## Initial Appraisal

### A. Author

1. What are the author's credentials – institutional affiliation, educational background, or experience? Is the book or article written in a topic in the author's area of expertise?
2. Has your instructor mentioned this author? Have you seen the author's name cited in other sources or bibliographies? Respected authors are cited frequently by the scholars.
3. Is the author associated with a reputed institution or organization?

### B. Date of Publication

1. When was the source published? This date is often located on the face of the title page below the name of the publisher. If it is not, look for the copyright date on the reverse of the title page.

2. Is the source current or out-of-date for your topic? Topic areas of continuing and rapid development, such as the sciences, demand more current information. On the other hand, topic in the humanities often requires material that was written many years ago.
- C. Edition or Revision  
Is this the first edition of this publication or not? Further editions indicate that the source has been revised and updated to reflect changes in knowledge include omissions and harmonize with its intended readers need. Also, many printings and editions may indicate that the work has become standard source in the area and is reliable.
- D. Publisher  
Note the publisher. If the source is published by a university press, it is likely to be scholarly. Although the fact that the publisher is reputable does not necessarily guarantee quality, it does show that the publisher may have high regard for the source being published.
- E. Title of Journal  
Is this a scholarly or a popular journal? This distinction is important because it indicates different levels of complexity in conveying ideas.

### **Content Analysis**

Having made an initial appraisal, you should now examine the body of the source. Read the preface to determine the author's intentions for the book. Scan the table of contents and the index to get a broad overview of the material it covers.

Read the chapters that specifically address your topic. As with the books, the presence and quality of a bibliography at the end of the article may reflect the care with which authors have prepared their work.

Intended audience

What type of audience is the author addressing? Is the publication aimed at a specialized or general audience? Is the source too elementary, too technical, too advanced, or just right for your needs?

### **Objective reasoning**

Is the information covered fact, opinion, or propaganda? It is not always easy to separate fact from opinion. Facts are usually verified; opinions, though may be based on factual information, evolve from interpretation of facts.

1. Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched, or is it questionable and unsupported by evidence?
2. Are the ideas and arguments advanced more or less in line with other works you have read on the same topic?
3. Is the author's point of view objective and impartial?