

Critical Reading

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Critical reading is really the same thing as critical thinking. It means reading—and thinking—with an open mind, not to agree or disagree, but to discover ideas and information. To be a critical reader doesn't mean **criticizing**. Instead, it assumes that written texts are not authoritative pronouncements, but rather human creations subject to interpretation and evaluation. In essence, everything is up for question. It follows that critical readers constantly ask the big question:

Am I really *thinking about what I'm reading*?

Then break that question apart into many other questions:

CONSIDER THE SOURCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What kind of publication is this?• What is the author's background in this subject?• To whom is the author writing?
RECOGNIZE WHAT IS SAID	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the author really said what I think he said?• Does the author make inconsistent statements?• What has the author assumed to be true? Are any of these assumptions stated? Unstated?
RECOGNIZE ASSUMPTIONS, IMPLICATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does a particular statement depend on context for its intended meaning?• What does the author imply? Insinuate?• Why is the author writing this? What is his motive? His purpose?• What is the author's attitude? Tone? Biases?
RECOGNIZE INTENT, ATTITUDE, TONE, BIAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the author mean what he says, or is he making his point in a roundabout way through humor, satire, irony, or sarcasm?• Are the author's words to be taken exactly as they appear, or are they slang, idioms, or figures of speech?• Which of the author's statements are facts? Which are opinions?• Does the author write emotionally? Using sentiment? Horror? Name-calling? Flag-waving?
ANALYZE ARGUMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which of the author's statements does he support? Which does he leave unsupported?• What conclusions does the author reach?• Of the author's conclusions, which are justified? Which ones are not justified?

A critical reader:

- follows evidence where it leads.
- considers all the possibilities.
- relies on reason rather than emotion.
- values exact thinking.
- considers the source of material before deciding how much weight to assign it.
- weighs the effects of motives and biases, both his own and those of the author.
- is more concerned with finding the truth than being right.
- doesn't reject unpopular views without examining them first.
- has good reasons for believing some things and disbelieving others, for agreeing with some authors and disagreeing with others

* Adapted from *Critical Reading Improvement*, Anita Harnadek (McGraw-Hill, 1978) and *I Know What It Says...What Does It Mean?*, Daniel Kurland (Wadsworth, 1995).