

CRITICAL READING

What is Critical Reading

Critical reading is an important precursor to critical writing. The most characteristic features of critical reading are:

- **Examine the evidence or arguments** presented.
- **Check out any influences on the evidence or arguments.**
- **Identify the limitations** of study design or focus.
- Decide to what extent you are prepared to accept the authors' arguments. In other words, **are you convinced by their opinions/ conclusions?**

How Critical Reading can Work for You!

Critical reading is a big part of understanding arguments. Although some of the material you read will be very persuasive, **do not fall overly romantic toward the printed word as authority.** Remember that the **texts you are assigned are usually debated subject matters**

TOP TIP

Authors (including you) have their own agenda! The goal should be to apply the author's ideas to your research topic and interpret them in your own words. Then you can stop thinking of these ideas as facts and start thinking of them as arguments.

Hidden Agendas

Here are some questions, that you can ask yourself when researching:

- What is the author trying to prove?
- What is the author assuming I will agree with?
- Do you agree with the author?
- Does the author adequately defend the argument?
- What kind of proof do they use?
- Is there something left out that you would have included?
- Would including further information alter the strength of the argument?

Authorship

🔍 TOP TIP

If you cannot find the author of a text you should ask yourself why? It may not be academic work, which is what you should be focusing on, because they will contain the arguments or debates.

- **Who is the author?**
- What do we know about them and **what position do they occupy?**
- **Why are they writing** the text, article or speech? Or why are they delivering it?
- **What can you say about their views**, biases, ideological outlook, etc.?
- **How close is the author to the subject** matter?
- **What motives** do they have with this particular text?

Time

- **When** was the text written?
- Was it produced by a team, over time, or an immediate reaction to the events?
- **How close in space and time** to the event was the document produced?
- **Consider the context** in which it was produced. Are there rival texts, explanations or interpretations?
- **When and why do we and the audience get to read** / hear the content?
- **Is it for public consumption?** Was it classified? Can we determine these issues?

Place

- **Where** was the text produced?
- To what extent does the **geographical location affect the content** or interpretation of the text?
- To what extent, if any, **does the place impact biases and determine the content** or outlook/ideology of the document?

Form

- **What type of document** are you dealing with?
- **Does the form affect the content** of the material or the style of delivery?

Audience

- **Who are the intended primary recipients** of the text?
- Do you know anything about the reception or **reaction** to the document?
- Do you know **why** the author / creator decided on a particular audience?



TOP TIP

These questions can also be applied to your own argument and will improve your ability to write effective arguments.

Useful links

- University of Leicester, Student Learning Development, 'What is critical reading', Available at: <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/writing/writing-resources/critical-reading>
- Cleveland State University, The Writing Center, 'Critical Reading: What is Critical Reading, and Why Do I Need To Do It?', Available at: <https://www.csuohio.edu/writing-center/critical-reading-what-critical-reading-and-why-do-i-need-do-it>
- University of Toronto Scarborough, The Writing Centre, 'Reading Critically', Available at: <https://www.utoronto.ca/twc/sites/utoronto.ca.twc/files/resource-files/CriticalReading.pdf>
- University of Leeds, Library, 'Critical Thinking: Critical Reading', Available at: https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/1401/academic_skills/105/critical_thinking/3

Other Relevant Online PDFs

- How to Write an Essay
- How to Build an Academic Argument
- Critical Thinking
- Evidence & Incorporating Research
- Counter Arguments