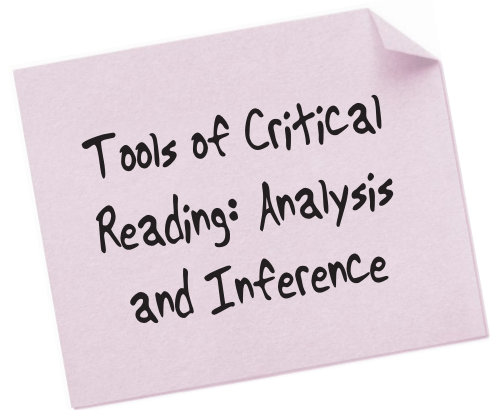
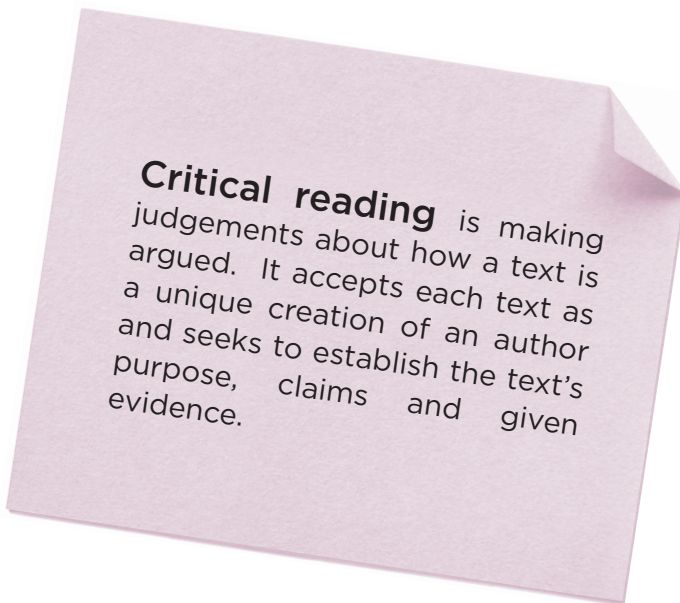




## What is Critical Reading?



- **To recognise the author's purpose**  
Done through an analysis of the author's choices of content and language
- **To understand tone and persuasive elements**  
Involves classifying the nature of language choices
- **To recognise bias**  
Involves the nature of patterns of choice of content and language

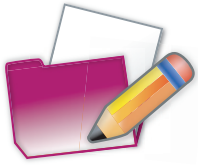


### Why Do You Need to Read Critically?

To write critically as required by your lecturers, you must firstly know how to read and think critically. No two authors hold similar viewpoints on a subject, thus reading critically enables you to determine what an author says and how he/she presents the subject matter. Reading critically has vital implications (i.e. important consequences) for your writing: it empowers you to write critically by presenting your own assumptions (value judgements), evidence (proof) and arguments that you can both defend and then draw your own conclusions from.

#### 1 Analysis (What to look for)

Analysing a text means reading to discover those parts of the discussion that contain the meaning. You do so by breaking the text into its smaller parts and studying these closely for meaning. Once these meanings are identified, your next focus is to determine how these smaller parts are related to form a whole. The goal of your analysis is to understand the whole, not only its individual parts.



## Activity 1: Analysis

Analyse the given paragraph, paying close attention to its 'parts' and their contributions to subject matter, main assertions; persuasive elements; and meanings.

Three important Swiss customs for tourists to know deal with religion, greeting, and punctuality. The Swiss people are very religious, and Sunday is their holy day. On Sunday, people rarely work in the garden, in the house, or even on the car. Foreign tourists should know that most drugstores, supermarkets, and banks are closed on Sunday. The Swiss are also a formal people. For example, they seldom call acquaintances by their first names; the German "Herr" and French "Monsieur" are much more frequently used in Switzerland than the English "Mister" is used in the United States. A tourist should therefore say either "Herr" or "Monsieur" when greeting an acquaintance, and only use the person's first name if he is a close friend. In addition, Switzerland is the land of watches and exactness. It is important to be on time to parties, business, meetings, and churches because Swiss hosts, factory bosses, and ministers all love punctuality. It is especially important for tourists to be on time for trains: Swiss train conductors never wait for late passengers. In summary, the tourists will do well to know and observe the Swiss customs relating to religion, greeting and punctuality.

Source (Wong: 2003)

Check your answer at the back

## 2 Inference (How to think about what you find)

Inferences are conclusions you reach through specific evidence; and evidence is collected through analysis. If you infer that something has happened, you do not see, hear, feel, smell, or taste the actual event. But from what you know, it makes sense to think that it has happened. As a critical reader, you go beyond the literal meaning of the words to find hidden meanings. That is, you infer, rather than find, meaning. You rely on your knowledge of language, social communication conventions, and shared experience and value to infer hidden meanings of words and sentences.



## Activity 2: Inference

Read the given scenario then draw an inference from it.

*Maika almost wished that he hadn't listened to the radio. He went to the closet and grabbed his umbrella. He would feel silly carrying it to the bus stop on such a sunny morning.*

What inference have you drawn from the above scenario?

- a Turner realized that he had an unnatural fear of falling radio parts.
- b Turner had promised himself to do something silly that morning.
- c Turner had heard a weather forecast that predicted rain.
- d Turner planned to trade his umbrella for a bus ride.

Check your answer at the back

How do we read critically?

Critical reading does not take a text at face value but continuously analyses evidence in a text. Since a text is the distinct work of an author, critical reading examines the three choices all authors make when writing about a topic: choices of content, language, and structure, for their effect on meaning.

## 1 Choice of content

As a critical reader, you must look for

- central claims (or premises) of the text
- evidence provided for an argument.
- the illustrations used to explain ideas.
- the details presented within a description.
- differences between assertions (statements) of fact, opinion, and belief.
- proof that evidence consists of references to published data, anecdotes (tales), or speculation.
- an evaluation of the persuasiveness of a text.

## 2 Choice of Language

As a critical reader, you must ask these questions to help you examine how the language and the style of writing clearly convey the author's argument or point of view in a text:

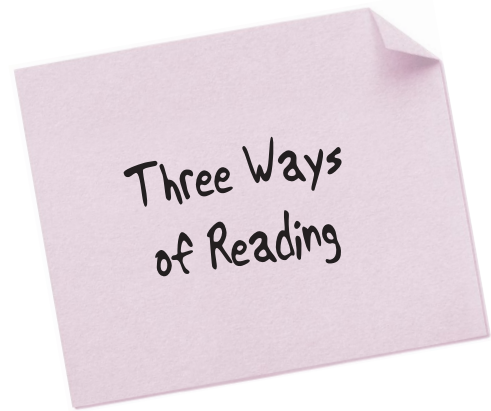
- Is the argument clearly expressed?
- Is it written in plain language or language that is obscured (vague or hidden)?
- Is the aim of the text clearly expressed in the introduction?
- What is the quality of the evidence?
- Is there a clear conclusion?
- Are any words and phrases ambiguous (have more than one meanings)?
- What inferences can you draw from the author's choice of language?

## 3 Choice of Structure

As a critical reader, you must be aware of how the author has organised his/her text. Some of the questions you should ask are:

- How does the author structure his/her argument?
- Has the author analysed (broken down) the material? How are they developed and argued?
- Is every point relevant?
- Does one point lead logically to the next?
- Is there coherency (unity) in the structuring of ideas from the beginning to the end?

- Can you distinguish between assertions offered as reason or conclusion, cause or effect, evidence or shown to be dissimilar, competing or contradictory?
- Can you recognise patterns of contrast?



There are usually 3 ways to read and discuss a text: **restatement** (reading what a text says); **description** (reading what a text does) and **interpretation** (analysing what a text means)

### 1 Restatement (what a text says)

- Read sentence by sentence for literal (i.e. plain) meaning.
- Recognise word meaning.
- Recognise sentence structure and sentence meaning.
- Restate what the text says
- Infer meaning from references (words referred to earlier), associations (related terms, ideas etc), and figurative (metaphorical) language.

### 2 Description (what the text does)

**Content:** recognise the major topics and subtopics under discussion.

- Who or what is talked about?
- What arguments are given?
- How are those groups or subtopics portrayed?

**Language:** be alert to the choice of terms

- What kind of language is applied to what topics?
- How is language employed for a purpose or effect?
- How is each subtopic portrayed through language?



**Structure:** recognise the relationship of each sentence to the others within paragraphs, and of one paragraph to the next within larger sections.

- Identify examples and conclusions.
- State how description and narration are used to reach a position.
- Recognise relationships between patterns of content throughout the text as a whole.
- Explain similarities, contrasts and/or clarifications

### 3 Interpretation and Overall Meaning

What meaning and understanding is implied by presenting ideas in this manner?

- Analyse what the text means
- Infer meaning from the way in which elements are portrayed and related
- Account for all of the elements as they are within the relationships in which they are presented.
- Assert an overall meaning

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#### Example:

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#### What a Text Says (restatement), Does (description) and means (interpretation)

Dr. Charles Drew, a black doctor, was a leader in the effort to store blood and, as director of the Red Cross, developed the first blood banks.

The passages below SAY somewhat the same thing. They convey essentially the same information. But they DO different things, and in so doing portray Drew slightly differently. (The second, for instance, includes a quotation.) And as a result, they MEAN slightly different things.

#### What is the overall message in each excerpt? As you read, ask yourself how the actions of Drew and other parties are portrayed

**Text 1:** *For a long time, the Army and Navy refused to accept blood from black people. Even after it started to accept "colored" blood, the Army told the Red Cross to separate the donated blood of black people from that of whites. Charles Drew explained that there was no such thing as "black" and "white" blood. Blood was blood. But no one listened. This made Charles Drew very sad and angry. He resigned from the Red Cross.*

**Text 2:** *Due to the success of his program [to collect, store and ship blood for transfusions in England], Drew was appointed as Red Cross director of a nationwide project to collect blood for the U.S. military. The project was going well until the armed forces told the Red Cross that it did not want any "colored" blood. Such a racist policy made no sense from any scientific or medical point of view. In an angry editorial, the Chicago Defender said:*

*No Negro blood accepted but---  
When the terrible blitz raids of London . . . killed and wounded thousands . . . it was an American Negro surgeon [who organized and sent] U.S. blood plasma overseas.  
No Negro blood accepted but---  
When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and maimed hundreds of American soldiers and sailors, it was blood collected by a Negro surgeon that saved their lives.*

*Because of this kind of protest, the military agreed to accept "colored" blood but insisted that it be kept separate from blood donated by whites. To Dr. Drew this directive was completely unacceptable, and he resigned from the blood program.*

#### Content, Language and Structure

In the content of the first text, Dr. Drew resigns out of frustration, (*very sad and angry ... Drew explained...But no one listened.*). In the second text, Drew resigns on principle [*this kind of protest,...this directive was completely unacceptable*] in response to and protest of the Red Cross's senseless [*made no sense from any scientific or medical point of view*], racist policy [*a racist policy*].

The presentations have similar structures: they

both contrast the actions and positions of the Army, Red Cross, and Dr. Drew. In each case, the Army's directive to the Red Cross is given as the cause of his quitting. But by portraying that action differently, as *examples of different behaviors*, different meanings are implied

### Inferences

(two different ones):

**Text 1:** resignation due to frustration  
implies: quitter

**Text 2:** resignation based on principle  
implies: courageous behavior

Source (Kurland: 2002)

Here's another simpler example:

### For Example: Restatement, Description, Interpretation

*Your doctor tells you to eat less chocolate and drink less beer.*

**Restatement:** The doctor said I should eat less chocolate and drink less beer.

**Description:** The doctor advised me to change my diet.

**Interpretation:** The doctor warned me to reduce my calories for the sake of my health.

*Only the interpretation attempts to find a hidden meaning in the statement, that the foods mentioned are high calorie.*

Source (Kurland: 2002)



## Activity 3: Restatement, Description, Interpretation

How would you restate, describe and interpret the rhyme below?

### Nursery Rhyme

*Mary had a little lamb,  
Its fleece was white as snow,  
and everywhere that Mary went  
The lamb was sure to go.*

Source (Kurland: 2002)

Check your answers at the back

The Link  
between Critical  
Reading and  
Critical Thinking

- **Critical reading** refers to a careful, active, reflective, analytic reading of a text.
- **Critical thinking** involves reflecting on what you've read in order to decide what to accept and believe.

Critical reading usually comes before critical thinking: only when we have fully understood a text (**critical reading**) can we truly evaluate its meaning (**critical thinking**).

For example:

### When considering the sentence:

*Parents are buying expensive cars for their kids to destroy them.*

a **critical reading** will seek to determine whether, within the context of the text as a whole, 'them' refers to the parents, the kids,

or the cars, and whether the text supports that practice. On the other hand, **critical thinking** would aim at deciding whether the chosen meaning is indeed true, and whether you, as the reader, should support that practice.

Source (Kurland: 2002)

## Some Practical Tips

- 1 Critical reading occurs after some preliminary processes of reading. Begin by skimming research materials, especially introductions and conclusions, in order to strategically choose where to focus your critical efforts.
- 2 When highlighting a text or taking notes from it, teach yourself to highlight argument: those places in a text where an author explains her analytical moves, the concepts she uses, how she uses them, how she arrives at conclusions. Don't let yourself focus on, and isolate facts and examples, no matter how interesting they may be. First, look for the large patterns that give purpose, order, and meaning to those examples. The opening sentences of paragraphs can be important to this task.
- 3 When you begin to think about how you might use a portion of a text in the argument you are forming in your own paper, try to remain aware of how this portion fits into the whole argument from which it is taken. Paying attention to context is a fundamental critical move.
- 4 When you quote directly from a source, use the quotation critically. This means that you should not substitute the quotation for your own articulation of a point. Rather, introduce the quotation by laying out the judgments you are making about it, and the reasons why you are using it. Often a quotation is followed by some further analysis.

(Source (Knott: n.d)



## Answers: Activity 1

Each part (word or phrase) has its own meaning, and when all the meanings of the parts supporting each assertion are put together, they collectively portray (show/display) a bigger picture/idea. For example: when put together, all the words or phrases supporting Assertion 1 above, together depict the Swiss as a religious people who observe Sunday as a holy day through restraining from work and business. Those words/phrases in support of Assertions 2 and 3 above collectively project the Swiss as a people who are both formal and punctual respectively. When these three different parts (assertions) are put together, they present us with 3 of the most valued customs of the Swiss people as a race.

### How does each part contribute to the Big picture?

**Persuasive elements (parts) for assertion 3:** Switzerland...the land of watches and exactness; important to be on time to parties, business, meetings, and churches because Swiss hosts, factory bosses, and ministers all love punctuality; especially important for tourists to be on time for trains; Swiss train conductors never wait for late passengers.

**Assertion 3:** The Swiss value punctuality.

**Persuasive elements (parts) for assertion 2:** Swiss are formal people; they seldom call acquaintances by their first names; the German "Herr" and French "Monsieur" are much more frequently used...in Switzerland than the English "Mister" is used in the United States; use the person's first name if he is a close friend.

**Assertion 2:** Swiss people are formal people.

**Persuasive elements (parts) for assertion 1:** Swiss people are very religious; Sunday is their holy day; On Sunday, people rarely work in the garden, house, or even on the car; most drugstores, supermarkets and banks are closed on Sunday.

**Assertion 1:** Swiss people are religious people.

**Subject matter:** Tourist must be aware of 3 important Swiss customs involving religion, greeting, and punctuality.



## Answers: Activity 2

Turner had heard a weather forecast that predicted rain. c



## Answers: Activity 3

**Restatement:** Mary had a lamb that followed her everywhere.

**Description:** The nursery rhyme describes a pet that followed its mistress everywhere.

**Interpretation:** The hidden meaning within the story is the idea of innocent devotion as seen in the lamb's devotion to its mistress.

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