



Critical Reading

What is Critical Reading?

CT & Reading

- A crucial aspect of being an effective critical thinker in the world is learning to read

critically.

- As a critical reader, you will analyze the text and evaluate its ideas and methods of presenting them. You will think of other subjects or issues to which the text might be connected.

- One of the most powerful tools in reading critically is asking the right questions.

(Chaffee 2011)

Asking questions

- **Asking questions will help you read critically. One set of useful questions is based on the basic components of writing: purpose, audience, subject, writer, and context.**

The purpose

What is the *purpose* of the selection, and how is the author trying to achieve it?

- Who is the intended *audience*, and what assumption is the writer making about it?
- What is the *subject* of the selection, and how would you evaluate its cogency and reliability?
- Who is the *writer*, and what perspective does she bring to the writing selection?
- What is the larger *context* in which this selection appears? Is the writer responding to a particular event or participating in an ongoing debate?

Questions of Interpretation

Questions of interpretation probe for relationships among ideas.

- Is a *time sequence* given in this text? If so, what is its importance?
- Is a *process of growth or development* explained in this text? If so, what is its importance?
- What is *compared or contrasted* in this text? What are the purposes of any comparisons?
- What is the *context* of the selection, and what contextual components might be significant? (For example, the time of its writing, characteristics of that time, the relationship to other works by the same author, whether or not it is a translation)
- Are *causes* discussed in this text? If so, what is suggested about those causes and their effects?

Questions of Analysis

Questions of analysis look at parts of a text and the relationship of those parts to the whole, and at the reasoning being presented.

- *Is this text divided into identifiable sections? What are they? Are sections arranged logically?*
- *What evidence or examples support the ideas presented in the text?*
- *Does the text give alternatives to the ideas presented?*

Questions of Evaluation

Questions of evaluation establish the truth, reliability, applicability—the value of the text. They usually address the effectiveness of the writing as well.

- **What is the *significance* of the ideas in this text?**
- **What is the apparent level of *truth* in this text? What criteria for truth does it meet?**

- **What are the sources of information in this text? Are they *reliable*? Why?**
- **Can the ideas in this text be *applied* to other situations?**
- **What is *effective* about the writing in this text? Clarity? The right tone?**

Appropriate—or imaginative—word choices? Organization?

Of course, you are not likely to ask all these questions about everything you read, and you will find other questions to ask as well.

problem-solving approach

- **Successful readers often approach difficult reading passages with a problem-solving Approach**

Step 1: What is the problem? What don't I understand about this passage? Are there terms or concepts that are unfamiliar? Are the logical connections between the concepts confusing? Do some things just not make sense?

Step 2: What are the alternatives? What are some possible meanings of the terms or concepts? What are some potential interpretations of the central meaning of this passage?

Step 3: *What is the evaluation of the possible alternatives? What are the “clues” in the passage, and what alternative meanings do they support? What*

reasons or evidence support these interpretations?

Step 4: *What is the solution? Judging from my valuation and what I know of this subject, which interpretation is most likely? Why?*

Step 5: *How well is the solution working? Does my interpretation still make*

sense as I continue my reading, or do I need to revise my conclusion?

Of course, expert readers go through this process very quickly, much faster

than it takes to explain it. Although this approach may seem a little cumbersome at

first, the more you use it, the more natural and efficient it will become.