

CRITICAL READING AS A PART OF ANALYTICAL AND SYNTHETIC PROCESSING

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Academic reading should not be seen as a passive activity, but an active process that leads to the development of learning. Reading for learning requires a

conscious effort to make links, understand opinions, research and apply what you learn to your studies.

As a part of analytical and synthetic processing of scientific information critical reading is an analytic activity. The reader rereads a text to identify patterns of elements – information, values, assumptions, and language usage throughout the discussion. These elements are tied together in an interpretation, an assertion of an underlying meaning of the text as a whole.

Critical thinking is an extension to critical reading and involves bringing outside knowledge and values to bear to evaluate the presentation and decide what to ultimately accept as true.

Critical reading means engaging in what you read by asking yourself questions such as, ‘what is the author trying to say?’ or ‘what is the main argument being presented?’ Critical reading involves presenting a reasoned argument that evaluates and analyses what you have read. Being critical, therefore – in an academic sense – means advancing your understanding, not dismissing and therefore closing off learning. To read critically is to exercise your judgement about what you are reading – that is, not taking anything you read at face value. Critical reading goes further than just being satisfied with what a text says, it also involves reflecting on what the text describes, and analysing what the text actually means, in the context of your studies.

As a critical reader students should reflect on:

What the text says: after critically reading a piece you should be able to take notes, summarise and write abstracts paraphrasing – in your own words – the key points.

What the text describes: you should be confident that you have understood the text sufficiently to be able to use your own examples and compare and contrast with other writing on the subject in hand.

Interpretation of the text: this means that you should be able to fully analyse the text and state a meaning for the text as a whole.

Critical reading means being able to reflect on what a text says, what it describes and what it means by scrutinising the style and structure of the writing, the language used as well as the content.

When you are studying reading should be seen as an 'active' exercise, in other words you engage with your reading to maximise your learning. One of the most effective ways of actively engaging with your reading is to make notes as you go along – linking points, pulling out key snippets of information etc. By writing notes, in your own words, you will be forced to think about the ideas that are presented in the text and how you can explain them coherently. The process of note-taking will, therefore, help you retain, analyse and ultimately remember and learn what you have read.

It is important to understand that effective note-taking means writing notes on what you have read in your own words. Copying what others have said is not note-taking and is only appropriate when you want to directly quote an author. It can be tempting, especially if your reading material is online, to copy and paste straight into a document. If you do this then you are unlikely to learn what you have read, as copying is not engaging with the text. Also, and especially if you are a student, copied text that ends up in an assignment is plagiarism – a serious academic offence.

Literature

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