

## 2.05 Critical reading

The information and tasks within this page are designed to introduce you to the concept of taking a deeper approach to your learning and in particular to the material you are reading.

### How do I read?

Answer the following questions:

1. I tend to read very little beyond what is actually required to pass	yes / no
2. I concentrate on memorising a good deal of what I read	yes / no
3. I try to relate ideas I come across in other topics to what I read	yes / no
4. When I read an article or book, I try to find out exactly what the author means	yes / no
5. Often I find myself questioning what I read	yes / no
6. When I read I concentrate on learning just those bits of information I need to pass	yes / no
7. When I am reading, I stop from time to time to reflect on what I'm trying to learn from it	yes / no
8. When I read, I examine the details carefully to see how they fit in with what's being said	yes / no
9. I like books which challenge me and provide explanations which go beyond the lectures	yes / no
10. I like books which give definite facts and information which can be learned easily	yes / no
11. I read an article straight through from start to finish	yes / no
12. I note down all the facts and figures	yes / no
13. I note the author's main arguments	yes / no
14. I think about whether the facts supported these arguments	yes / no
15. I make summary notes to use later	yes / no

*Based upon the ASSIST Approaches to Studying Inventory. © Noel Entwistle*

## Score

If you have answered 'yes' to all or most of questions: 1,2,6,10,11,12,15 you are adopting a **SURFACE APPROACH** to your learning. You are organising your learning in order to be able to remember facts and figures to use in essays and exams. Many students' previous experience of learning is of a school system where exams assessed their ability to memorise and regurgitate, and a good student was one who could remember lots of information.

If you have answered 'yes' to all or most of questions: 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14 you are adopting a **DEEP APPROACH** to your learning. You are thinking critically about the information you read and trying to make sense of it in the wider context of your studies. This approach to learning and studying shows initiative and understanding and an ability to undertake independent study. Many tutors, when questioned, would include this in their definitions of an 'ideal student'.

Can you see the difference between the two approaches?

SURFACE APPROACH = MEMORISATION

DEEP APPROACH = UNDERSTANDING

### ***Characteristics of a Surface Approach to Reading***

- Intention to complete task requirements
- Memorise information needed for assessments
- Failure to distinguish principles from examples
- Treats task as an external imposition
- Focus on discrete elements without integration
- Unreflectiveness about purpose or strategies
- "I just read through from start to finish."
- "I tried to concentrate on remembering as much as possible."
- "I didn't remember what I read, because I was just hurrying on."

### ***Characteristics of a Deep Approach to Reading***

- Intention to understand
- Vigorous checking of content
- Relate new ideas to previous knowledge
- Relate concepts to everyday experience
- Relate evidence to conclusions
- Examine the logic of the argument
- "I tried to get at the main points of the article"
- "I thought about how the author had built up their argument"

Source: [www.hope.ac.uk/gnu/stuhelp/reading.htm](http://www.hope.ac.uk/gnu/stuhelp/reading.htm)

# Critical Reading: Questions to ask of yourself and a text

## ***Before reading the text:***

Have you tried asking all, or any, of the questions below?

- Why am I reading this? What is my purpose? Why is it on my reading list?
- What do I know about the author, the publisher, the circumstances of publication and the type of text? How do these affect my attitude towards and expectations of what I am about to read? Why?
- What are my own views of the event(s) or topic before I start reading this particular text?
- What other texts (written and spoken) on this or similar topics am I familiar with? What are my views about them?

## ***While reading the text:***

- What are the key points?
- What language does the writer use? How does this affect the information?
- Which information is relevant to the assignment you are writing? Why? Are you sure?

## **Examine the author's argumentation:**

Highlight any evidence the author supplies for his/her arguments:

Is there enough evidence? Is it convincing? Can you think of counter evidence or counter examples? How do your answers affect your reading of the text? Have you checked the claims/statements?

Does the author make his/her points explicit or not? Do you agree with them or not?

## ***After reading the text:***

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What information have I found so far? How/can I use this in my work?
- Have my views of the event(s) or topic been reinforced or altered in any way? How? Where do I now stand?
- What have I learned? What do I feel? How can I use this reading experience, now and in the future?

*Based on: Clark, R. Critical Reading, available from:  
[www.lancs.ac.uk/users/furness/criticalreading.htm](http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/furness/criticalreading.htm)*

## **Critical Reading of a Journal Article**

Try using this method with an article given to you by your tutor, or which you have found yourself.

We recommend you use this method a couple of times. The idea is to encourage you not to rush through the article, but to think carefully about each section. Read each

section and then write down your answers to the questions before you go on to the next section. It will be hard work, but will also get easier every time you do it! You need to be able to answer all of the following questions.

## **Introduction**

### **1. What is the author's goal?**

The point of the introduction is to detail the reason behind the research and give an overview of the previous studies carried out in the area. It is essentially a literature review and will also include a description of theories that the author thinks may provide a good explanation of the particular behaviour or phenomena being described. It is useful to try and work out which theory that you think the author might agree with. You may find this difficult at this stage but as you become more familiar with an area and particular authors work you will start finding this much easier.

### **2. What is the hypothesis or prediction that is being tested?**

This should be fairly clear and are usually stated towards the end of the introduction section.

### **3. How would I design an experiment to test the hypothesis?**

This is the most important question for this section and you should attempt to write down an answer before you continue your reading as it will be very difficult to do this once you have read the method section. If the author has done a good job he/she will have convinced you that their particular design is the best approach for testing the hypothesis.

## ***Method***

### **4. (a) Which is the best method?**

This doesn't really matter, but if you compare the two, you will be forced to think about this section critically.

### **(b) Does the author's method test the hypothesis?**

This is straightforward - check that the author has done what he/she said he/she was going to do.

### **(c) What are the independent and dependent variables and what happens in the different conditions if there are any?**

Write them down in a list.

## ***Results***

### **6. Are you surprised by the results?**

Why? Are the results hard to believe? Was the author's method appropriate for testing the hypothesis?

### **7. (a) How would you interpret the results?**

Should be fairly straightforward. What do they mean in relation to the hypothesis? Can this be applied? Think about any real-world users of the study. What implications does it have for future research in the area?

### **(b) Can you draw any applications and implications from your interpretation?**

Again, answer these two questions before moving on to the next section

## ***Discussion***

### **8. (a) Which interpretation of the results suits the data the best?**

A good discussion should answer the question(s) set up in the introduction. The author should also present implications and applications of the research. Has the author drawn conclusions that are acceptable in relation to the data? The conclusions drawn may be reasonable but the author may have attempted to generalise these more than is possible.

### **(b) Is the discussion of the applications and implications convincing?**

As well as carrying out a well-controlled experiment a researcher must also consider the rationale and theory that underpin the research. By looking at the author's consideration of the theory and its implications you can get a good idea of the integrity of the work.

*Source: [www.ibs.derby.ac.uk/~kpat/Israel\\_cognitive/Reading\\_journal\\_papers.rtf](http://www.ibs.derby.ac.uk/~kpat/Israel_cognitive/Reading_journal_papers.rtf)*