

# LEARNING

## DEVELOPMENT & SUCCESS

### LDS “How to” Series: Critically Analyzing a Text

#### What is Critical Reading?

Critically analyzing a text involves judging how the authors are thinking about the subject matter<sup>1</sup>. This includes asking yourself what arguments an author is making and how the author reaches their conclusions. Critical analysis can be used for academic papers, but also to analyze other works such as poetry, novels, and prose.

#### What is Close Reading?

Close reading is a detailed look into a text (or section of text)<sup>2</sup>. This involves reading while looking for details such as structure, themes, and references. Close reading allows you to interpret the author’s intention with a text and come to conclusions about it.

#### How are Critical Reading and Close Reading Related?

Critical analysis is how you judge the arguments made in a text. Close reading is how you develop your ideas regarding their arguments or ideas presented in the text. Both require careful attention, critical thinking and interpreting beyond the information that is presented.

#### How do I do this?

To practice critical reading, it is important to read actively<sup>3</sup>. Active reading involves using the information that you are reading so that you can understand and remember it more effectively. McGuire and McGuire (2018) suggest that there are steps to active reading<sup>3</sup>:

1. Preview the text
  - a. Skim the text to see what it is about
  - b. Determine the major themes or topics it will address
2. Prepare yourself for active reading
  - a. Determine if there are questions that the text can answer for you (ex. What is a strong acid? What is the theme? Etc.)
3. Paraphrase the text
  - a. After each paragraph or break in the text, paraphrase the main ideas to yourself
  - b. With each new paragraph or break, add in your paraphrased information from the previous section
4. Supplement your reading
  - a. Make note of important words, themes, characters, or questions you have in the margins
  - b. Highlight, underline, annotate and use any other strategies you like to pick out important information

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### I've read actively. Now what?

Now it is time to ask yourself questions about the text. Here are a few to get you started<sup>4</sup>:

- What is the author's perspective?
- Is there another approach or perspective that the author could have taken?
- Whose perspective is omitted from the text?
- Whose perspective is the piece written from? Does this affect what is included in the text?
- Is there evidence to support the author's claims?
- Is opinion presented as fact?
- What themes recur in the text?
- Are there assumptions made explicitly within the text?
- Are there assumptions that are implicit in the text?
- Are there conclusions drawn in the text?
- Are the conclusions valid?
- How are others' ideas framed?
- Does the author appeal to your emotion?
- What is the overall tone of the text?
- Are any biases present in the writing?
- How do the biases alter the argument, if applicable?
- Does the argument succeed? Are you convinced of the thesis by the time you finish reading it?

The following may not apply to all texts:

- What research methods are being used?
- Is the methodology valid?
- Are the statistical methods valid?
- Are the diagrams well chosen?
- Are the diagrams clear?
- Are the results consistent with the argument?

#### References

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2. Kain, P. *How to do a Close Reading*. 1998. The Writing Centre at Harvard University. Accessed 31/08/23. <https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading>
3. McGuire, S.Y., and McGuire, S. *Teach yourself How to Learn: Strategies You Can Use to Ace Any Course at Any Level*. 2018. Stylus Publishing LLC. Print.
4. *Critical thinking: critical reading & note-making*. University of Wollongong Australia. PDF Handout. Accessed on 01/09/23. <https://documents.uow.edu.au/content/groups/public/@web/@stsv/@ld/documents/doc/uow195593.pdf>