

# Critical reading



What is critical reading?  
Why is it important?  
How can critical reading help your academic writing?

## What does the word critical mean?

Critical (to find fault in something)  
*For example, "The cake is too dry."*

Critical (to show something is very serious)  
*For example, "My grandmother is in hospital and the doctor said it is very critical."*

Critical (to look at different things from different perspectives and to think independently)  
*For example: Her book review was excellent. She reviewed the book in a critical way and pointed out the different themes/ideas.*

## What is critical reading?

Critical reading involves practising *active* reading skills. A critical reader has the capacity to read *literally* and *critically*.

When you critically read a text you are able to look beyond the surface of what is being said.

Critical readers ask questions as they read. They engage and analyse their reading from different perspectives.

## Why is critical reading important?

Critical reading is essential to academic development. Without critical reading, it is difficult to engage in critical thinking and writing.

Well developed critical reading skills ensures that you read with purpose and value. Reading for essays and dissertations is not meant to be a passive and inactive process.

Critical reading ensures you nurture your critical thinking skills.

# The skills of a critical reader

## Critical Readers

Active engagement with reading material. A willingness to question and challenge whilst considering the evidence.

Look at the strengths and limitations of every theory/argument/view. Draw links and differences between theories and authors.

Read a variety of material. Books, journals and website articles etc.

Critical readers are able to demonstrate their critical reading & thinking skills in their writing.

## Passive Readers

Passive. Accept reading material without considering the information from different angles.

Accept any argument or view. Avoid looking beyond the surface of the text.

Rely on reading textbooks. Avoid reading more challenging material.

Passive readers often produce written work that is more descriptive than critical.

## Two modes of reading approach (reading strategy)

### Mode 1: Reading *with* the author: understanding the author's perspective

- Make sure you truly understand the author's views and ideas. Bullet point or mind map the author's ideas/assertions for future reference.
- At this stage do not question or challenge the author's views. Instead focus on the arguments and ideas expressed. Consider the ideas for their own value.

### Mode 2: Reading the author *critically*: engaging the author in a dialogue

- Now you can question or challenge the author or theory. Look at the *strengths and limitations* of the arguments/ideas. Are there questions that you feel the author has not addressed? Can you think of other theories or ideas that either support or contradict the author's arguments?
- Continue to develop your critical reading skills and take your thinking to the next level.
- Consider your own perspective. At this stage you can draw links between the reading material and your essay or dissertation topic.

## Three Criticals



If you develop your critical reading skills, you will also develop and enhance your critical thinking and writing skills.