

# CRITICAL READING

(adapted from: *Critical Reading*. Elizabeth Browning; revised by Karen Kyger and Cate Bombick, Howard Community College Faculty: <https://pressbooks.howardcc.edu/criticalreadingcriticalwriting/chapter/chapter-1-critical-reading/>. August 2022)

**“Critical”**/critic = from Latin *criticus* "a judge, a censor, an estimator," also "grammarian who detects spurious passages in literary work," from Greek *kritikos* "able to make judgments," & *kriterion* "means for judging, standard"; further, from *krinein* "to separate, **decide**" (from PIE root \*krei- "to sieve," thus "discriminate, **distinguish**").

(from etymonline.com: [https://www.etymonline.com/wordcritical#etymonline\\_v\\_29088](https://www.etymonline.com/wordcritical#etymonline_v_29088))

*“Reading does not come naturally. It is not an instinct that you were born with — rather, it is a cultural development that began 6,000 years ago when humans began to use symbols to represent ideas...Reading is a learned skill that relies on interaction nature, nurture, and culture. It is a cognitive tool that is developed through learning and practice.”*

## **E**xpectations for Reading in College

In college, academic expectations change from what you may have experienced in high school. As the quantity of work expected of you increases, the quality of the work also changes. You must do more than just understand course material and summarize it on an exam. You will be expected to engage seriously with new ideas by:

- reflecting on them,
- analyzing them,
- critiquing them,
- making connections,
- drawing conclusions, or finding new ways of thinking about them.

Educationally, you are moving into deeper waters. Learning how to read and write strategically and critically will help you swim.

High School Reading	College Reading
<b>Primary Types:</b> Textbook literature	<b>Primary Types:</b> Textbook, literature, persuasive analysis, research, multimedia sources, selected material
<b>Student Expectations:</b> Read to find the main idea, share opinions, and make personal connections	<b>Student Expectations:</b> Read to form new conclusions about the author or text, generate examples that support/refute a text and compare/contrast texts. Use texts to develop questions for further inquiry.
<b>Student Goals:</b> Understand text and share reactions to the text, be able to answer questions posed by the teacher, and ask questions to clarify understanding.	<b>Student Goals:</b> Analyze the text and synthesize to enter academic conversations on a topic, be able to ask questions, and share insights with peers and professors in order to further the conversation.
<b>Teacher Expectations:</b> Complete reading/assignment, answer who, what, when, where, and how questions, and share connections to the text.	<b>Professor Expectations:</b> <i>Develop thoughtful reactions to assignments, enter into conversation on the topics, “why” questions about the focus; sharing questions and answers about a topic.</i>
<b>Teacher Goals:</b> Check student understanding of the material through assignments (test, quizzes, papers, etc).	<b>Professor Goals:</b> To guide and respond to student’s analysis and synthesis of information. <i>Comprehension is assumed.</i>

**If Problems Arise:** Teachers may go out of their way to help students who are performing poorly on exams, missing classes, not turning in assignments, or struggling with the course. Students are often given “second chances” to complete and submit assignments.

**If Problems Arise:** Professors may notice students performing poorly, but often expect students to be proactive and take steps to help themselves (i.e. attending office hours, emailing professors, etc.). “Second chances” are less common.

## What is critical reading?

Reading critically does not simply mean being moved, affected, informed, influenced, and persuaded by a piece of writing. It refers to analyzing and understanding the overall composition of the writing as well as how the writing has achieved its effect on the audience.

This level of understanding begins with thinking critically about the texts you are reading. In this case, “critically” does not mean that you are looking for what is wrong with a work (although during your critical process, you may well do that). Instead, thinking critically means approaching a work as if you were a critic or commentator whose job it is to analyze a text beyond its surface.

This step is essential in analyzing a text, and it requires you to consider many different aspects of a writer’s work. Do not just consider what the text says; think about what effect the author intends to produce in a reader or what effect the text has had on you as the reader. *Why* does a writer write the text you’re reading? For example, does the author want to **persuade, inspire, provoke humor, or simply inform the audience?** Look at the process through which the writer achieves (or does not achieve) the desired effect and which rhetorical strategies are used.

## Why do we read critically?

Critical reading has many uses. If applied to a work of literature, for example, it can become the foundation for a detailed textual analysis. With scholarly articles, critical reading can help you evaluate their potential reliability as future sources. Finding an error in someone else’s argument can be the point of destabilization you need to make a worthy argument of your own, illustrated in the final

tweet from the previous image, for example. Critical reading can help you hone your own argumentation skills because it requires you to think carefully about which strategies are effective for making arguments, and in this age of social media and instant publication, thinking carefully about what we say is a necessity.

## **H**ow to read critically: Questions to Ask a Text

Inquiry-based learning methods, or question-based investigations, are often the basis for writing and research at the college level. Specific questions generated about the text can guide your critical reading process and help you when writing a formal analysis.

When reading critically, you should **begin with broad questions** and then work towards **more specific questions**; after all, the ultimate purpose of engaging in critical reading is to turn you into an **analyzer** who asks questions that work to develop the purpose of the text. In order to develop good questions before reading a text, think about your purpose for reading. As a college student, think about why your professor assigned this particular text: how does this text connect to topics you have been discussing in class or to other assigned readings? Another **effective questioning strategy is to turn the title or a sub-heading into a question by adding *what, how, or why* to the title or heading**. You can turn the title into a question by adding *how*. The question becomes “How do colleges prepare people for life?” Once you have finished reading the essay, **return to that question to see how well you can answer it using the information you learned from the text**.

## What Are Questions to Ask As You Are Reading?

(Excerpts From: Mike Bunn. "How to Read Like a Writer" **Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing**, Volume 2 © 2011)

- What is the author's purpose for this piece of writing?
- Who is the intended audience?
- How effective is the language the author uses? Is it too formal? Too informal? Perfectly appropriate?
- What kinds of evidence does the author use to support his/her claims? Does he/she use statistics? Quotes from famous people? Personal anecdotes or personal stories? Does he/she cite books or articles?
- How appropriate or effective is this evidence? Would a different type of evidence, or some combination of evidence, be more effective?
- Are there places in the writing that you find confusing? What about the writing in those places makes it unclear or confusing?
- How does the author move from one idea to another in the writing? Are the transitions between the ideas effective? How else might he/she have transitioned between ideas instead?