Critical Reading Strategies

As a college student, you have a lot of reading each week including textbook chapters, research articles, and online information. You are also expected to read everything with a critical eye.

How to I Sharpen My Critical Reading Skills?

Reading critically does not mean that you are criticizing the writer's message. Instead, as a critical reader, you are assessing validity and reliability of the writing. Critical readers are also aware that they bring their beliefs, values, experiences, and prior knowledge to the reading process. Critical readers ask questions about themselves, the writer, and the writing. Below is a set of questions to sharpen your critical reading strategies.

Menu of Critical Reading Questions

Reader's Background and Assumptions
- What do I know about the topic?
- What are my beliefs and values regarding the topic?
- What is my purpose for reading this material?

Writer's Background and Value Assumptions
- What is the writer's background? How might it affect the writer's approach to the topic and the selection and interpretation of the evidence presented?
- What are the writer's assumptions?

Writer's Argument and Conclusion
- What is the writer's argument?
- What is the writer's conclusion?
- How has the writer limited the scope of the argument through defining key terms and using qualifying words and phrases?

Writer's Use of Evidence to Support Conclusion
- Are there any logical fallacies?
- What sort of evidence does the writer use to support the conclusion(s)? Does the evidence offer adequate support for the writer's conclusion? Are the sources creditable?

Reader's Reaction to the Reading
- To what degree do I accept the conclusion?
- How does the conclusion relate to what I already know and believe about the topic?
- How has the writer's argument changed my views on this topic?

If the writer uses research studies as evidence, does the research satisfy these conditions:
- Is it timely?
- Is the sample group representative of the target population?
- Who conducted the research?
- What was the purpose of the research?
- Has the research been replicated?
- Are the statistical findings and the writer's conclusion focused on the same topic?
- Do the graphic illustrations represent the data in a truthful manner?
- Do the various physical dimensions of the graphic accurately portray the numerical relationships?
- What is the source of the data in the illustration?