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## Critical Reading

**Critical reading** means that a reader applies certain processes, models, questions, and theories that result in enhanced clarity and comprehension. There is more involved, both in effort and understanding, in a **critical reading** than in a mere "skimming" of the text. What is the difference? If a reader "skims" the text, superficial characteristics and information are as far as the reader goes. A **critical reading** gets at "deep structure" (if there is such a thing apart from the superficial text!), that is, logical consistency, tone, organization, and a number of other very important sounding terms.

**What does it take to be a critical reader?** There are a variety of answers available to this question; here are some suggested steps:

### 1. Prepare to become part of the writer's audience.

After all, authors design texts for specific audiences, and becoming a member of the target audience makes it easier to get at the author's purpose. Learn about the author, the history of the author and the text, the author's anticipated audience; read introductions and notes.

### 2. Prepare to read with an open mind.

Critical readers seek knowledge; they do not "rewrite" a work to suit their own personalities. Your task as an enlightened critical reader is to read what is on the page, giving the writer a fair chance to develop ideas and allowing yourself to reflect thoughtfully, objectively, on the text.

### 3. Consider the title.

This may seem obvious, but the title may provide clues to the writer's attitude, goals, personal viewpoint, or approach.

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#### **4. Read slowly.**

Again, this appears obvious, but it is a factor in a "close reading." By slowing down, you will make more connections within the text.

#### **5. Use the dictionary and other appropriate reference works.**

If there is a word in the text that is not clear or difficult to define in context: look it up. Every word is important, and if part of the text is thick with technical terms, it is doubly important to know how the author is using them.

#### **6. Make notes.**

Jot down marginal notes, underline and highlight, write down ideas in a notebook, do whatever works for your own personal taste. Note for yourself the main ideas, the thesis, the author's main points to support the theory. Writing while reading aids your memory in many ways, especially by making a link that is unclear in the text concrete in your own writing.

#### **7. Keep a reading journal.**

In addition to note-taking, it is often helpful to regularly record your responses and thoughts in a more permanent place that is yours to consult. By developing a habit of reading and writing in conjunction, both skills will improve.

**Critical reading** involves using logical and rhetorical skills. Identifying the author's thesis is a good place to start, but to grasp how the author intends to support it is a difficult task. More often than not an author will make a claim (most commonly in the form of the thesis) and support it in the body of the text. The support for the author's claim is in the evidence provided to suggest that the author's intended argument is sound, or reasonably acceptable. What ties these two together is a series of logical links that convinces the reader of the coherence of the author's argument: this is the warrant. If the author's premise is not supportable, a critical reading will uncover the lapses in the text that show it to be unsound.

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