

Critical Reading



All academic work has flaws

(hence critique is an epistemic driver of new knowledge)

In order to critique you need to develop skills and acquire knowledge. You need to interpret, evaluate and analyse the information given to you. Your focus for that needs to be on the logic of the argument. You will need courage.

Critique goes beyond the summary or description of a text. It is also not your opportunity to simply voice your (unsupported) views. It is a balanced view of what has been presented to you, acknowledging strengths and weaknesses of the arguments. Some of the information might be primarily weak, other information might be primarily strong and in many cases you will find a good mix of the two.

Go about critical reading in three stages

- 1 Read to gain the information and leave all judgement aside, take your time, keep an open mind.
- 2 Read to understand the argument. Make a conceptual map of the article to understand structure and logic. Identify main concepts and their relationships with each other. Look at the presented evidence. You will find the foundation of the argument and how this is going to be substantiated in the introduction.
 - > What is the reading's background or context?
 - > What is its purpose and conclusion?
 - > What evidence is being used?
 - > What are the logical connections between the claims being made and the evidence presented?
- 3 Read to work out what the flaws are in the argument. Ask yourself:
 - > What are the problems with the connections between the ideas, theories, assumptions, inferences and evidence presented?
 - > What are the assumptions or implications of the argument?
 - > What are the strengths and limitations of the argument?

Tips

- > Critical reading requires sustained intellectual labour.
- > Read widely and beyond the borders of your field of study.
- > If you don't understand the words in the text you will need to use a dictionary and other appropriate references to work them out.
- > Create a network of friends who are willing to critically read your work.
- > Read with a pen in your hand. Take notes of important points, potential weaknesses and things you are unclear about and work through them after each reading.