

# Critical or analytic reading

Critical or analytical reading enables you to engage with the text and create deep meaning through a variety of processes. These processes include an initial appraisal of the text, followed by answering of key questions allowing you to process the reading at several levels of analysis, followed by recording your thoughts and responses.

## Step 1 Make an initial appraisal: evaluate the source

Decide if the source is worth reading by considering the following aspects.

**Title**—Can you predict what the reading is about?

**Author**—What are the author's credentials? Background? Institution? Past publications? Area of expertise?

**Publication**—Is it authoritative? Peer reviewed? Focus? Expertise of editorial committee? Scholarly?

**Timing**—Is it recent? Significant research?

**References**—Quality & quantity? Experts? Type of sources?

## Step 2 Record bibliographic details

Write down all the details you will need for your reference list. Check referencing guidelines if you are uncertain. The principles are that you record: author or authoring body, year, title, publication details.

### Develop a system to manage your references

- Teach yourself to use *RefWorks* or *EndNote*—check the Library website ([www.library.unisa.edu.au](http://www.library.unisa.edu.au))
- Automatically record all the bibliographic details and check that the referencing details are accurate and complete e.g. similar to the *Reading Log* (Learning Connection).

## Step 3 Prepare to read the source

Before reading for detail, take a few minutes to obtain an overview of the reading by establishing the following.

### Establish your purpose for reading

- Decide on your reason for reading. Write down a question to which you need to find answers.

### Read a summary

- Either read the abstract, introduction and/or conclusion or all.

### Record new vocabulary

- Write down new terminology, the meaning and use the term in a sentence (Hint: use [www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com))

### Skim the reading to get an overview

- Read headings, sub-headings, tables, diagrams

### Scan a section

- Read one or two sections in detail

### Read a section

- Highlight key points and then summarise these with notes on the document, using a diagram or in a few sentences.

#### Step 4 Read the source in detail

Now you read to get the meaning of the sections that you have decided to read.

##### Read a section

- Read the first sentence of each paragraph in the section.
- Highlight key points and then summarise these with notes on the document, using a diagram or in a few sentences.

#### Step 5 Think about the information you are reading

The key to critical reading is asking questions. Ask some questions at different levels of analysis (refer to *Levels of Understanding* handout).

##### Literal

....

##### Lateral

....

##### Critical

....

##### Speculative

....

#### Step 6 Talk, talk, talk!

Another way to extend your thinking about what you are reading is to talk about it with your peers, friends and supervisors or lecturers. Discuss the reading at any level of understanding. Joining a reading group is a way to discuss a series of readings on the same topic.

#### Step 7 Write about the information you are reading

Record your thoughts at the literal, lateral, critical and speculative levels either on a *Reading log*, *RefWorks* or *EndNote*.

**Write a paragraph about the reading. Summarise and then make a critical comment.**

#### Sources

Johnston, H 2006 '*Reading critically*,' notes prepared for the January Academic English Language Program, Learning Connection, University of South Australia, Adelaide.

Learning Connection 2003, *Reading log*, available Learning Connection, University of South Australia.

Learning Connection 2003, *Levels of understanding*, available Learning Connection, University of South Australia.