

Critical Reading Instructions

(pdf version)

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Chapter 1

Critical Reading Instructions

You or your assigned group will do two “critical reading” assignments. The purpose of this assignment is threefold:

1. To **understand** an article even more deeply by reading it critically in a group.
2. To **help other students understand** the article by presenting your critical reading.
3. To **kick-start discussion** of this article by posing the questions your reading raised.

Let’s zoom in on each of these goals.

I. Understanding

Your goal first and foremost is to understand the assigned article. Discuss it as a group. Re-read the article multiple times. Your goal is not to “divide and conquer” but for everyone to get a good understanding of the article. Disagree. Change your mind. Try to summarize it to yourself in one paragraph, then one sentence. Work hard to understand it.

A great way to achieve understanding is to answer these Critical Reading 6 questions: Use this template as you read, discuss, and take notes.

- Author’s Thesis: What is their thesis? What is their answer? Their solution? Their main truth claim?
- Author’s Question: What is the author’s question? What problem are they trying to solve?
- Author’s Arguments: What is the argument for their thesis? What reasons does the author give to believe their thesis? What evidence? What support?
- Author’s Objections: What counterarguments do they consider? What objections to their thesis?
- Your Judgment: How do you respond to the author’s thesis? Agree or disagree? If you agree, what argument persuades you? If you disagree, what objection persuades you?
- Your Question: What remaining question do you have? What do you wonder about the author’s assumptions, implications of their thesis, key terms, motives, or their arguments? Do not just ask, “what do you all think?”

Answer all these questions as clearly and succinctly as you can, individually and as a group. You don't need to turn in the form below, but you can use it if it helps you.

II. Presenting

On the assigned day, one or all of you will present your Critical Reading.

Walk the class through the article's arguments, counter arguments, and then present your opinion. We have all read the article, but maybe didn't read it as closely as you did.

How long is your presentation? 8 minutes is fine, 20 minutes is fine, but 15 minutes is perfect. (Your goal is not to talk for 50 minutes!) Summarize what you think the author is saying, then respond.

Since there are 1-3 people per group, you can fill out *one* Critical Reading Template and present that. or you can fill out three Critical Reading templates and present just one of them (whichever you decide).

III. Discussion

Conclude your presentation with one or two questions that you are left with after reading the author's article. These questions will hopefully foster discussion but can be almost anything. Just make sure it is your sincere question that you are really wondering. Critical Reading 6-Point Template

Author's Question. What is the question the author wants to answer?

Thesis. What is the author's answer — their thesis, their truth-claim?

Arguments. What are the author's main argument (evidence and reasons to think the author's thesis is correct)?

Objections. What objections does the author present (reasons to think the author's thesis is incorrect)?

Your Opinion. Is the author's thesis correct, in your view? If not, what premise is false, what term unclear, or what inference invalid?

Question. What is the main question you are wondering, after reading this article?

(Optional) **Key terms.** What are the author's key terms and how are they defined? (Optional): **Assumptions.** What are the author's assumptions or presuppositions? (Optional): **Implications.** Suppose the author's thesis is right — what would follow logically?