

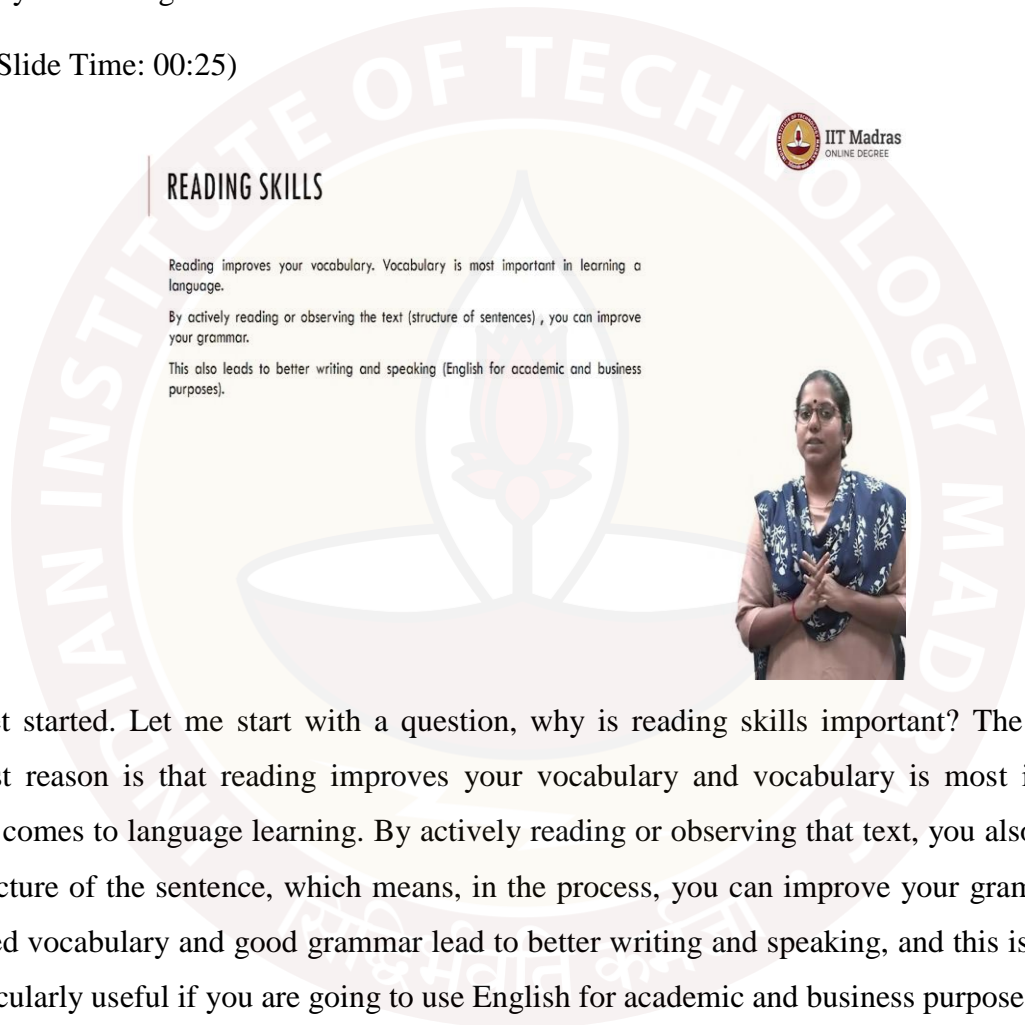
IIT Madras

ONLINE DEGREE

English – I (Basic English)
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Lecture 24
Tips for Reading Comprehension

Hello all, I welcome you to this module. In today's module, I will be giving you a few tips to improve your reading skills.

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READING SKILLS

- Reading improves your vocabulary. Vocabulary is most important in learning a language.
- By actively reading or observing the text (structure of sentences), you can improve your grammar.
- This also leads to better writing and speaking (English for academic and business purposes).

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Let's get started. Let me start with a question, why is reading skills important? The first and foremost reason is that reading improves your vocabulary and vocabulary is most important when it comes to language learning. By actively reading or observing that text, you also observe the structure of the sentence, which means, in the process, you can improve your grammar. So, enhanced vocabulary and good grammar lead to better writing and speaking, and this is going to be particularly useful if you are going to use English for academic and business purposes.

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THE RULES FOR COMPREHENSION

Read out loud (at times) – reading and listening

Read a book with a pen.

Do a quick scanning of the book/passage for important key passages/ points.

Read the entire paragraph or the passage before you highlight something.

Pay attention to summary words – therefore, as a result, hence, in short, in conclusion etc.

Circle key words or difficult jargons in a passage.

Paraphrase what you read.

Interact and engage with the text (who is the main character, what issue does this article address? What is the author trying to tell you? Does she make compelling points? Does the author show any bias?) Look for answers while you read.



Let me come to the first subsection of this module, i.e., the rules for comprehension. So, the first and foremost rule is to read out loud at times, particularly the important passages. So, if not the entire book, you can read out important passages. So, reading out loud also means slow reading. So, in the process, you read with inflexions and punctuations, which means there is going to be better understanding.

Also, as you read out loud, you also get to hear what you read, which means listening is embedded in the process of reading out loud. So, simultaneously you read and listen, and therefore your grasp of concepts, keywords and the structure of the sentence is going to be better. The second rule is to read a book with a pen. Why? Because every time you come across a keyword or a summary statement or an important passage, you can mark it. So that once you are done marking, once you are done reading the book, you can always go back to the important marked sections of the book or the passage.

The third rule is to do a quick scanning of the book or the passage for key or important passages or points. While reading, do not start by reading word by word, do a quick scan and find key terms and summary statements. Read the entire paragraph or passage before you highlight something. That is the next rule. So, before you highlight, this is only when you highlight, okay. Before you highlight, you make sure that you have read the entire passage because quite often, the first sentence might come out very striking, but not necessarily that the summary statement is the first statement.

So, some passages can be tricky, so to notice that, make sure that you read the entire passage before marking the important points. The fifth rule is to pay attention to summary words; what are summary words? Therefore, as a result, hence, in short, in conclusion, etcetera are summary words. So, these words are followed by the author's note or the author's conclusion of what the article is all about.

The next important rule is to circle keywords or difficult jargons in a passage. It is always important to mark keywords or jargons. If you mark jargons, and if you do not know the meaning of that jargon, try to interpret the meaning of that from the context or the sentences situated before and after those words and try to infer meaning from the context. The next rule is to circle keywords or difficult jargons in a passage.

By doing this, you know what is important in the passage, and when you underline a jargon, you also know what you have not really understood. The only technique that you can apply to solve the problem of jargon is to read the meaning from the context. The seventh important rule is to paraphrase what you read. If you are not able to paraphrase or translate it in your own words, it means you have not understood the paragraph.

So, make sure that you paraphrase what you have read. The final important point is to interact and engage with the text. What does that mean? That means to critically read a piece of text. So, ask these questions, who is the main character? What issue does this article address? What is the author trying to tell you? Does she make compelling points? Does the author show any bias? So, look out for answers while you read a book or a passage.

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READING COMPREHENSION FOR TESTS - TIPS

Budget your time

How many passages? How many exercises? How much time?

Less time on short/easy passages and more time on difficult/ longer passages.

Time yourself and stick to the plan.

Reading plan

1. Skim the text : Reading the surface of the text to understand the overall message.

- heading, subheading (subject of the text)

- read the first few sentences of each paragraph.



Now, coming to the next subsection of this module, i.e., reading comprehension for the test. I am going to give you a few tips that are going to be useful for you when you are writing a test, and it involves reading comprehension passage. So, the first thing that you need to do is budget your time. These are important questions. Look for the number of passages, how many passages are given in the test, how many exercises need to be solved, how much time do I have?

So, give less time to short or easy passages and give more time to the difficult and longer passages. And, make sure that you time yourself and stick to that plan. The next process involved is reading the passage. So, to start with, you should skim the text; what is skimming? Skimming is reading the surface of the text to understand the overall message. So, how do you skim a text?

You look out for headings and subheadings. Why? Because it helps you understand the subject of the text. Then, read the first few lines of each paragraph. It is always a first few lines or the last few lines that summarize the paragraph. So, you can look out for summary statements in the first two lines or the last two lines. Now, after skimming, you have a rough idea of what the passage is about, what do you do next? Let me substantiate this point with an example.

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READING COMPREHENSION FOR TESTS - TIPS

Read the first line (marked in red) of the two paras and try to understand the main topic in each paragraph.

Philosophy of Education is a label applied to the study of the purpose, process, nature and ideals of education. It can be considered a branch of both philosophy and education. Education can be defined as the teaching and learning of specific skills, and the imparting of knowledge, judgment and wisdom, and is something broader than the societal institution of education we often speak of.

Many educationalists consider it a weak and woolly field, too far removed from the practical applications of the real world to be useful. But philosophers dating back to Plato and the Ancient Greeks have given the area much thought and emphasis, and there is little doubt that their work has helped shape the practice of education over the millennia.



So, we will do a small paragraph comprehension to understand this point better. So, this paragraph is about the philosophy of education. So, let me read out the first few sentences of this paragraph, it is marked in red. 'Philosophy of education is a label applied to the study of the purpose, process, nature and ideals of education.'

And, if you further read, you will notice that the first sentence of this paragraph which I read out is the summary statement of that paragraph. Similarly, in the second paragraph, 'many educationists consider it a weak and woolly field, too far removed from the practical applications of the real world to be useful.' This again is a summary statement of the entire paragraph. So, now that after skimming, you have a rough idea of what the passage is all about, what do you do next?

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READING COMPREHENSION FOR TESTS - TIPS

2. Go ahead with the easiest exercises :

- read the questions and fully understand them.
- understand the keywords or their synonyms (help you identify the answers).

According to the passage given below, is the following statement True or False

a) Educationists consider philosophy a 'weak and woolly' field.

Philosophy of Education is a label applied to the study of the purpose, process, nature and ideals of education. It can be considered a branch of both philosophy and education. Education can be defined as the teaching and learning of specific skills, and the imparting of knowledge, judgment and wisdom, and is something broader than the societal institution of education we often speak of. Many educationists consider it a weak and woolly field, too far removed from the practical applications of the real world to be useful. But philosophers dating back to Plato and the Ancient Greeks have given the area much thought and emphasis, and there is little doubt that their work has helped shape the practice of education over the millennia.



You then go ahead with the easiest exercises. So, make sure that you read the questions and fully understand them. So, after understanding the questions, look for keywords or synonyms of keywords, this will help you identify the answers. Let me substantiate this with an example. So, here is the same reading paragraph. Now the question is, according to the passage given below, is the following statement true or false?

Educationists consider philosophy a weak and woolly field. So, what are the keywords in this question? Educationist and weak and woolly field; I have underlined the key terms. So, now you are going to be searching for these key terms in the passage. So, where do you see that? Yes, here it is, the fourth line says, 'many educationists consider it a weak and woolly field, too far removed from the practical applications of the real world to be useful.' So, your answer is true.

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READING COMPREHENSION FOR TESTS - TIPS

3. Read the text and find the answers.

4. Move on to the next exercise.

Challenges while reading – Lack of rich vocabulary and practise.



Now, the third important point is to read the text and find the answers. So, once you are done with skimming, once you identify keywords and you answer easy questions, then it is time for you to get to the hard and difficult questions that required you to read word by word. So, you need to read word by word, moving your fingers through the text. So, in the process, you will be able to find out the answers.

Now, let us suppose you get stuck with jargon, or for that matter question, you are not able to find the answer to that question, what do you do? Do not spend more time on one question or a single jargon. Whenever you get stuck with a jargon, try to infer the meaning of that jargon from the context. Look out for meaning from the surrounding information. For example, the word woolly here, I do not understand what the word woolly is, what do I do? I read out the entire sentence.

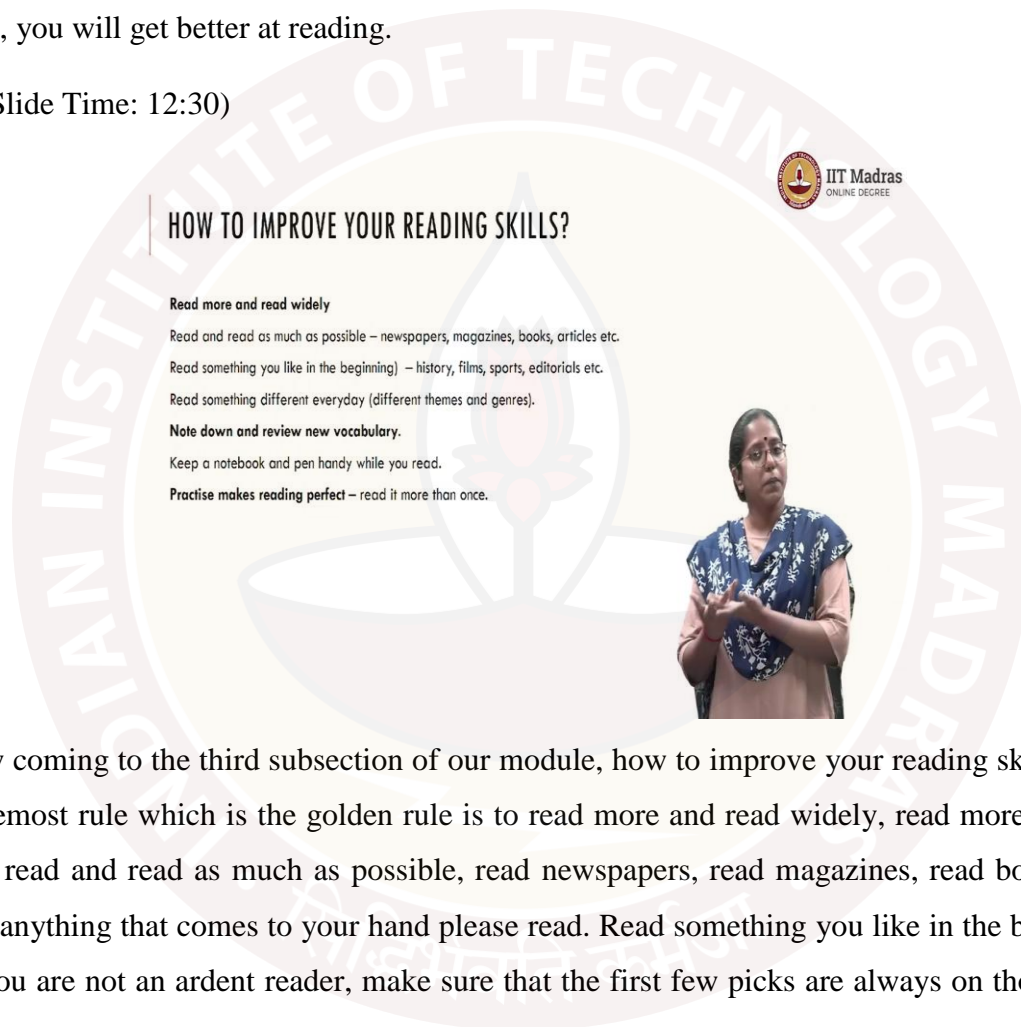
So, it says, 'many educationists consider it a weak and woolly field, too far removed from the practical applications of the real world to be useful.' So, I infer that, woolly in this context does not have a positive connotation and it is something similar to a weak field which means I can infer that the meaning is related to something vague or unclear. So, you do not get stuck with a single jargon or a single question.

Do not spend; it can eat up your time, so, do not spend more time on a single question. So, move on to the next exercise. And then, if you have solved all the answers and you can later come back to that difficult question and try answering that question. So, what are the challenges we face

while reading? So, all of us would have done comprehension passages at some point in our life's in exams.

So, my experience says that one of the biggest challenges is the lack of rich vocabulary, so you often get stuck with jargons. The second problem is that I might get stuck with certain questions or I do not know how to go about, so there is a mismanagement of time, so which means there is a lack of practice. So, once you address these two issues; lack of rich vocabulary and lack of practice, you will get better at reading.

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The slide is titled "HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR READING SKILLS?". It features a list of tips for improving reading skills. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a woman speaking. The background of the slide has a large, faint watermark of the Indian Institute of Technology Madras logo.

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR READING SKILLS?

- Read more and read widely**
Read and read as much as possible – newspapers, magazines, books, articles etc.
Read something you like in the beginning) – history, films, sports, editorials etc.
Read something different everyday (different themes and genres).
- Note down and review new vocabulary.**
Keep a notebook and pen handy while you read.
- Practise makes reading perfect** – read it more than once.

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So, now coming to the third subsection of our module, how to improve your reading skills? First and foremost rule which is the golden rule is to read more and read widely, read more and read widely, read and read as much as possible, read newspapers, read magazines, read books, read articles anything that comes to your hand please read. Read something you like in the beginning. So, if you are not an ardent reader, make sure that the first few picks are always on those topics that interest you.

For example, if you love history, choose history books, if you love films, pick books or articles related to films. If you like sports, pick up something, read something from the sports section of the newspaper or pick up books related to sports. If you are interested in current affairs, make sure that you read editorials, newspaper editorials, etcetera. So, read something different every day.

So, as you gradually progress, make sure that you read different kinds of materials and different genres touching up on different topics. So, while reading, it is also important that every time you come across a new word or a jargon, you note it down and review that vocabulary later. So, for that, what do you do? You keep a notebook and a pen handy while you read.

And then coming to the final point, practice makes reading perfect. Yes, read as much as possible, read as many times as possible, read more than once and what happens is, you get acclimatized to the jargons. And, now when you pick up new jargons, when you pick up new words, try to use that in your daily speech with your friends or family.

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CRITICAL READING

1. Separating facts from opinion.

Facts: information that can be proved true through objective evidence. Facts can be checked for accuracy and thus proved true. Here is a fact: China is the most populous country in the world.

Opinion: belief, judgement or conclusion that cannot be objectively proved true. Here is an opinion: the best treatment for thyroid is homeopathy. (There is no consensus in the scientific community that it is true)

Note: Much of what we read is a mixture of fact and opinion.

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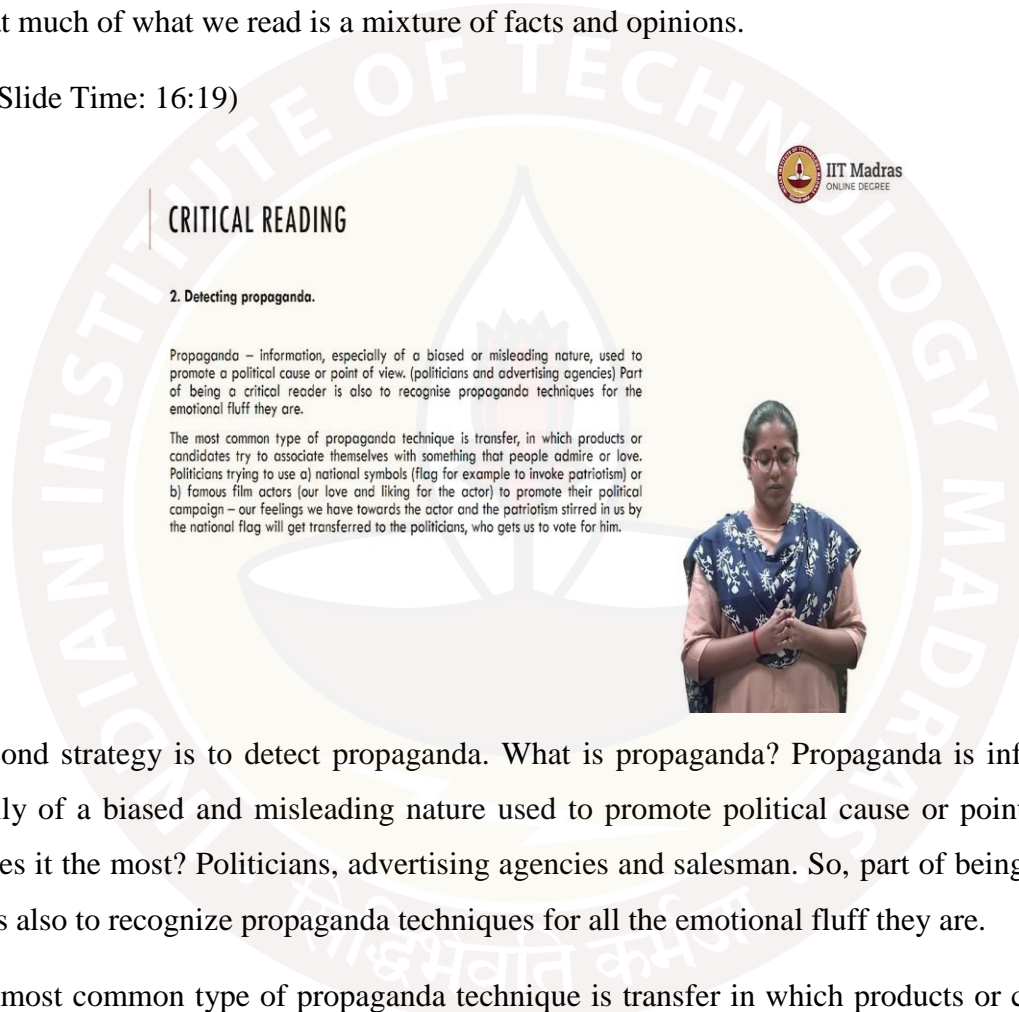
Now, coming to the final section of this module, we have critical reading as the fourth subsection. What is critical reading, and why is critical reading important? So, to read critically, you need to follow these three strategies. The first one is separate facts from opinion. What is a fact? Fact is information that can be proved true through objective evidence and facts can be checked for accuracy and thus proved true.

For example, if I say that China is the most populous country in the world. In that case, it is a fact because I can substantiate my argument with data, there is a lot of data supporting that statement, and therefore it can be called a fact. However, an opinion is a belief, judgment or

conclusion that cannot be objectively proved true. Here is an opinion, 'the best treatment for thyroid is homoeopathy.'

So, there is no consensus in the scientific community that this is true. It is my opinion, or it is my belief that the best treatment for thyroid is homoeopathy. Someone might feel that allopathy has better treatment options, or Ayurveda does better in treating thyroid. So, what needs to be understood is that critical reader should be able to separate facts with the writer's opinion. Also, note that much of what we read is a mixture of facts and opinions.

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CRITICAL READING

2. Detecting propaganda.

Propaganda – information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view. (politicians and advertising agencies) Part of being a critical reader is also to recognise propaganda techniques for the emotional fluff they are.

The most common type of propaganda technique is transfer, in which products or candidates try to associate themselves with something that people admire or love. Politicians trying to use a) national symbols (flag for example to invoke patriotism) or b) famous film actors (our love and liking for the actor) to promote their political campaign – our feelings we have towards the actor and the patriotism stirred in us by the national flag will get transferred to the politicians, who gets us to vote for him.

The second strategy is to detect propaganda. What is propaganda? Propaganda is information, especially of a biased and misleading nature used to promote political cause or point of view. Who uses it the most? Politicians, advertising agencies and salesman. So, part of being a critical reader is also to recognize propaganda techniques for all the emotional fluff they are.

So, the most common type of propaganda technique is transfer in which products or candidates try to associate themselves with something that people love or admire. Politicians try to use national symbols, flag, for example, to invoke patriotism or famous film actors to transfer love and liking for the actor to the politician. So, this he uses to promote their political campaign. So, in the process, what happens is, that our feelings that we have towards the actor and the patriotism stirred in us by the national flag will get transferred to the politicians who get us vote for him.

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CRITICAL READING

Recognizing errors in reasoning.

Valid point – supported by rocklike foundation of solid support.
Fallacious point – based on a house of cards that offers no real support at all.

One common fallacy is circular reasoning – the supporting reasoning is really the same as the conclusion. It is illogical. For example: Mahesh is a great swimmer, because he is so wonderful at swimming. Supporting reason: he is so wonderful at swimming; Conclusion: Mahesh is a great swimmer. We still do not know why he is a great swimmer. No real reasons have been given.

False cause – a fallacy that oversimplifies the issue. That is, to assume that because event B follows event A, event B was caused by event A. For example: Every day, I eat paratha for breakfast. One time, I had a dosa instead, and there was a major earthquake in my city.



The next strategy is to recognize errors in reasoning. What is a valid point? A valid point is always supported by a rock-like foundation, so there is solid support there. Whereas, a fallacious point is something that is based on a house of cards that offers no real support at all. Let me substantiate that with a few examples.

So, one common fallacy is called circular reasoning in which the supporting reasoning is the same as the conclusion. So, it means it is illogical. For example, 'Mahesh is a great swimmer because he is wonderful at swimming.' What is the supporting reason? 'He is wonderful at swimming; and what is the conclusion, 'Mahesh is a great swimmer.' It is illogical because we still do not know why he is a great swimmer, so no real reasons have been given.

The next technique or the next common fallacy is called false cause. A fallacy that oversimplifies the issue, this is to assume that because event B follows event A, event B was caused by event A. For example, 'every day I eat paratha for breakfast, one time I had a dosa instead, and there was a major earthquake in the city.' There was an earthquake in the city not because you had dosa. So, this is an example that helps us understand the false cause.

So, make sure that while you read, you recognize these errors in reasoning, you look for valid points, and you look for fallacious points. So, to summarize, in this lesson, we have learned that critical readers evaluate an author's support for a point and determine whether the support is solid or not. Critical reading involves the following three abilities; separating fact from opinion,

detecting propaganda and recognizing errors in reasoning. So, with that we come to the end of this module, I will meet you with a different module on a different day. Until then, stay safe. Happy learning. Bye.

