



IIT Madras

BSc Degree

Copyright and terms of use

IIT Madras is the sole owner of the content available in this portal - onlinedegree.iitm.ac.in and the content is copyrighted to IIT Madras.

- Learners may download copyrighted material for their use for the purpose of the online program only.
- Except as otherwise expressly permitted under copyright law, no use other than for the purpose of the online program is permitted.
- No copying, redistribution, retransmission, publication or exploitation, commercial or otherwise of material will be permitted without the express permission of IIT Madras.
- Learner acknowledges that he/she does not acquire any ownership rights by downloading copyrighted material.
- Learners may not modify, publish, transmit, participate in the transfer or sale, create derivative works, or in any way exploit, any of the content, in whole or in part.

English - 1 (Basic English)
Ms Deepa B. Kiran
Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, Chennai
Critical Reading

Welcome. Today, we are going to look at Critical Reading. Reading as an activity in itself involves focus, concentration, effort, which might sometimes come naturally, depending on the text we are reading, depending on where we are reading, depending on how connected we are with what we are reading.

However, when we speak specifically about critical reading, we are talking about a process where one is not just reading, casually, we are not just skimming through something, we are not just looking at it in passing. Or letting our eyes gleam all the information, sort of get the summary or the essence of the idea, which are also ways of reading. And we do it on so many different occasions where perhaps it might even be required.

For example, let us say you are travelling in a taxi in the traffic and then you look up at a billboard, it could be an advertisement, it could be a film poster, that is just a quick look, you will give perhaps, it might make deeper connections about some other film or some lines you have read somewhere depends nevertheless.

The chances of getting involved in that as critical reading in the manner in which we are going to explore is more likely when we sit down with specific texts where there is a certain effort that we are consciously investing in. Because our goal at the end of this reading is not just to complete reading the text, but to get clarity about the content of the text, what the text has to say, how the ideas have been presented.

And to be entirely able to comprehend and understand it. That is the goal with which one approaches a text for reading, when we say that we are going to engage in critical reading. Now, there are a few things to keep in mind to help us read the text critically. As I mentioned, these you will find that sometimes they probably come naturally to you.

Like I said, if it is a topic of your interest, if there are many reference points, if there are many reference points that you already have regarding the same. If it piques your curiosity, if it seems to be building your knowledge, then naturally a critical reading process begins to happen. So, we are discussing here, points, which could be happening naturally.

But which one could also make a conscious attempt using these tips, using these models, processes, perhaps learning to call out the theories and find some approaches to start with. Even before we read a text critically, we try and become a more informed person about the work of that particular author or the authors of that texts. And how do we do this, by reading up a little more about the author, about the works of that particular author.

And for that particular work itself, read references, read the introduction, read some notes that might have been given in the start, the foreword. All of these are ways to prepare yourself to become a better receiver of the text that has been meant for a specific audience. You are tuning in, let us say like a radio frequency more into the particular channel of that particular author or set of authors.

And that focus area of the text by doing a little bit of reading about the text, about the author, about the different texts the same author has written, trying to understand what is it that being said in the foreword in the introduction, all of this would contribute to critical reading. One, which is the preparation for receiving the text. Second, would be one of my favorite ideas, which is about going with an open mind.

There is a lovely quote about the parachute. “The parachute has a smooth landing, only when it opens, it is going to crash land otherwise.” I agree, the metaphor of the parachute is not relevant for every context. But for this context of critical reading, it would help us to remember that going with an open mind offers us possibilities to read the text more critically.

By which I mean, we are keeping aside our prior knowledge, our subjectivity, our judgement and our evaluation. And in our head, we are not editing and rewriting the text, even as we read it. We are acknowledging what is written there, while we read it. We are giving the author his or her due worth when we engage in the process of reading that text.

We are not writing it off, dismissing it, being condescending towards the text. We choose consciously to go and read the text with an open mind. Again, an integral aspect of critical reading. Reading with an open mind. Next is an idea that you have probably met many times, when reading of books was introduced to you as a child. The teacher would sometimes just pick up a book, show you the cover page, asked you to read the title.

And then ask you to predict to guess. What do you think the book is about? What do you think this author’s written about just by reading the title? So, consider the same, dwelling on

the title of the book. What has been said? Why has it been said? What could have been the possible reasons for the author to choose this title, these set of words and not others?

What might it tell us about the author's personality, their personal pursuits in life, their approach, their perspectives. Of course, there is also the publishing house involved. What is the kind of work the publishing house is also doing? It is worth considering, dwelling and looking at these aspects as well. It really expands our spectrum as a reader as a critical reader. So, the third point would be dwelling on the title of the text.

Critical Reading is certainly not as easy a task as just skimming through or reading otherwise. So, it involves a little effort, effort in the nature of understanding the vocabulary and the specific terminologies that are being employed in the particular text. As we know, sometimes certain words mean something entirely different in a legal context or in a medical context or in the context of data science.

So, become familiar with these terminologies. If it requires a little effort to go search online, now everything is at the fingertips. We just have to Google or look up MW Webster, Merriam Webster, any of these to help us understand one the more complex vocabulary, which are just larger words that do not make sense to you, which are the ways you could have jumped over but given you are doing critical reading, it is good to stop identify these tough words.

As well as the terminologies that you are not able to comprehend. It is always best to look up the meanings, the definitions, before you go further with your critical reading. Of course, sometimes just as we continue to read, we begin to understand that particular terminology. But if we wish to approach with the mind of a critical reader, it is a fantastic idea to stop, understand the vocabulary, understand the terminologies and put in that extra effort towards that.

Googling it up, looking up a dictionary, looking up a thesaurus, perhaps even noting it down and cross checking with a peer or a colleague or a teacher to cross verify. So, this would be another aspect of critical reading the words and the terminologies understanding them. Next, we come to the idea of putting down in writing. Yes, a significant aspect of critical reading is putting down in writing. And what do we mean by that?

There were days when it was a practice for the learner to rewrite the entire text that they were reading. Well, we do not live in those times anymore. However, we certainly live in times

where it is still recommended to write, to write what of what you read. When the author chooses to write a work, they obviously put down the points, put down their ideas.

And for every idea, this substantiated with examples, with proof, with explanations and usually they would be introducing the idea and then summarizing the idea. Some authors do it very evidently, they might split it up into intro the points and then the conclusion, and then even give you bullet points of the summary. Perhaps it depends on the text, it depends on the author.

But definitely, when we do critical reading, we as a reader can actually read the text looking for all of this, by which I mean, in our mind, we are asking the question. So, what exactly does the author want to say here? What is that one critical idea? Or what are the two three main ideas that the author is speaking about writing about here? How is he or she supporting the ideas?

What are the examples being given? What are the explanations being given? How are the ideas being linked from one to the other? What are the main words, terminologies or perhaps phrases and sentences? What are the main words, phrases, terminologies, perhaps sentences, which are really important and critical that I do not want to forget?

It would be good to identify all of these. Some people like to underline, some people like to highlight, some people make little comments. Find what works for you. Gather together what you have identified, whether you have highlighted or underlined or made the notes. And it would be a good idea to put all of this down as bullet points or notes, or a mind map or sketch notes or doodles, whatever works for you.

Some also find it helpful to go and explain all of it after reading to a friend or appear. That seems to sink in and hook the learning in their mind. If that is you, then go ahead and share what you read with someone else. A super way by yourself as an individual practice and task to achieve the same is to write it down. You are literally talking to your book about what you have just read. So, writing down one seals, the learning much deeper for you.

Secondly, the next time you need to go back to this text. You would not have to read the entire text. You would have the summary and the notes that you have created for yourself as a critical reader. These would be reasons good enough to make the effort to write and jot down notes. Another valuable aspect of critical reading is connections. What do I mean by connections?

When you read a text, what are the dots in your mind that connect with the knowledge that you have about the same text? What are the different connections with different areas of knowledge that this text is bringing up for you? It would be good to keep your mind open to that as well. Which means what is it that you have studied prior about the same subject, any personal, social, political, historical, whatever may be the relevant context.

Any of these connections that come up for you with the text is valuable for you to notice and to put down. As a critical reader, having this kind of rich 360-degree perspective to your knowledge and learning would be very valuable more so in times, where interdisciplinary learning and knowledge and approaches are highly valued and encouraged.

So, making connections with your own knowledge base with your own experiences, with your own thoughts and ideas about the same text. After reading the text, would be a significant quality of a critical reader. With that, we come to the end of this episode on critical reading, where we looked at a few ways of becoming more conscious and aware, critical readers.

What is the kind of effort we are going to put in order to be able to get clarity and comprehend the text better. The ideas we looked at were, one, preparing yourself to receive the text. Two, approaching the text with an open mind. Three, dwelling on the title of the text. Four working on understanding the vocabulary and the terminologies in the text.

Five, putting down and writing the essential ideas as notes. Six, bringing a 360-degree perspective to whatever is being read from our own knowledge base, our own references, personal, social, political, and other spaces after we finished reading the text. Needless to say, Critical Reading is a process that will be slow, focused, a very conscious task involving effort.

The results are deeply meaningful, valuable, and can impact not only our reading, but our writing and the entire repertoire of knowledge that we build as learners or as professionals in whatever field we may be in. Thank you.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:52)

Critical Reading

- Critical Reading involves conscious and focused effort.
- Following certain processes and methods
- A clear intent and determination to understand the text in depth

Things you could do to be a critical reader

1. Prepare to receive the written works on this topic and by this author
2. Be open and receptive to 'new' knowledge and repackaged old knowledge
3. Reflect on the title, tag line, index, chapter headings
4. Take help of dictionary and any other technical support

Things you could to be a critical reader

5. Write down notes/points
6. Make connections and references with your own knowledge-base : life experiences, socio-political understanding, technical background in the subject, relations between this and your knowledge in another subject, knowledge of a related subject etc.
7. Read to get not only the eagle's eye view but go deep into the text and the topic

