

GUIDE TO READING CRITICALLY

At the university level, reading critically has to do with analyzing and evaluating the material you read. The terms *critical*, *critique*, or *critically evaluate* do not have the same negative meanings as they often do in everyday life. Similarly, an argument involves proposing a point of view and supporting it with evidence.

Reading for information is only part of the story. You also want to develop your own ideas and understanding of the material being covered. To do this, you need to understand different points of view and to see how these are supported with evidence. This is what reading critically means. Whether you disagree or agree with the writer's argument, you will need to evaluate how well it is presented.

Critical reading involves two steps: reading and critically evaluating what you've read. Here are some tips on reading:

- Have/create a space where you can concentrate – even if for only a short time.
- Having dictionaries and class notes handy is very helpful.
- Having paper handy allows you more space to take notes and do reflective work.
- Some people like to write in the text and/or use highlighters. I caution people on using highlighters – we have a tendency to go overboard and end up with a yellow text – not so helpful for going back and studying for exams. Make a decision about what you're going to highlight (e.g., key words, thesis) and stick to it and/or write *why* you highlighted something in the margins for when you review later.
- Do the critical evaluation part as soon as possible after reading the article so that everything is fresh in your mind.

Then use the following questions to help you analyze and evaluate what you are reading.

1. What is the topic?
2. What is the theme, thesis, or main idea?
3. What are the key words? Key concepts?
4. What material does the author use to support their argument (e.g., news articles, interviews)? Do you see these sources of information as valid? Why or why not?
5. What conclusions does the author make?
6. What would be included in a one paragraph summary of the work?
7. How is the argument presented? Does the author use authoritative or persuasive language?
8. How does the author's arguments in this particular work relate to your class?
9. Do you agree or disagree? Why? What is your evidence?
10. What questions do you have? Do they have to do with the style of presentation, the evidence, or the author's conclusions?