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CRITICAL READING SKILLS

WHAT IS CRITICAL READING? (1)

- Knowing your **purpose** – *what do you want to get out of this piece of reading, ultimately?*

- **Focusing** on what you need – *read the sources you think will be most helpful for your purpose, focus on the most relevant sections, and only take notes on relevant information*

- Choosing appropriate **reading strategies** – *skimming, scanning, memorizing, rereading…*

- **Thinking** critically about what you read - asking questions, challenging statements

> Don't just collect *information – think critically about the information you're presented with, in order to build your own argument*

IDENTIFYING SUITABLE SOURCES

- **Three key questions:**

  - ➤ **Is it relevant?**

  - ➤ **Is it recent enough?**

  - ➤ **Is it academic?**

WHAT IS CRITICAL READING? (2)

Critical reading involves engaging with the text by **asking questions** rather than passively accepting what it says.

> Is the methodology sound?

> What was the purpose?

> Do ideas flow logically?

> Are arguments properly formulated?

> Is the evidence there to support what is being claimed?

MODEL 1: SQR3

- **Survey** – look at the front and back covers, scan the table of contents, look at the title, headings and subheadings, read the abstract, introduction and conclusion

- **Question** – what are the questions (you hope!) the text will answer? What questions do the title/introduction/conclusion prompt? What do you already know about this topic? What else might you need to know?

- **Read** – read slowly, section by section, returning to your questions, and write notes

- **Recite** – summarize key points from memory, and try to answer the questions you posed

- **Review** – go back over your notes and check they're clear

MODEL 2: DESCRIBE, ANALYZE, EVALUATE

- **Describe**
  - **Who** is the text by? **Who** is the text aimed at?
  - **What** is the text about? **What** is its purpose?
  - **Where** is the problem/issue situated? **When** was the text written?

- **Analyze**
  - **How** does one factor affect another? How does this fit into the bigger picture?
  - **Why** did this issue arise? Why is this argument/theory a useful response?
  - **What if** this or that factor were added/altered/removed?

- **Evaluate**
  - **So, what** makes is significant/successful? What are the implications?
  - **What next** in terms of what can be learnt, or what needs doing?

READING STRATEGIES

❖ **Scanning** – looking over material quickly in order to pick out specific information; looking out for particular terms or phrases or names or headings

❖ **Skimming** – reading something fairly quickly to get the general gist

❖ **Close reading** – reading something in detail, slowly, and probably more than once!

You'll probably need to do **all three** when reading an academic text: **scan** to determine scope and relevance, skim to pick out key facts and parts to explore further, **read more closely** to understand in more detail and think critically

TAKING NOTES

There is no right or wrong way – you just need to find a method that suits you!

For example…

- ❑ bullet points

- ❑ mind maps and diagrams

- ❑ highlighting

- ❑ annotating

- ❑ underlying

TAKING NOTES: DOS AND DON'TS

- Don't attempt to write everything down!

- Don't lose track of your purpose in taking notes – stay focused

- Don't worry if you come across something you don't understand – use question marks to flag uncertainty

- Don't forget to revisit and reorganize your notes

- Don't be afraid of trying out different methods of taking notes – lists, colours, bubbles, squares…

TACKLING DIFFICULT CONTENT

- Set time aside when you'll be able to work without interruptions

- Read things more than once

- Try and summarize each paragraph in your own words

- Talk to a friend about it!

- Try taking a break and coming back to it later

- Register your response, and consider whether the text itself is at fault!