

CRITICAL READING

A critical reader constantly asks one big question:

AM I REALLY THINKING ABOUT WHAT I'M READING?

Critical reading must take into account the premise that texts are written with specific purposes. Analyzing a text's source, intent, attitude, tone, bias, assumptions, and arguments can help readers understand the overall purpose of the author and critically read the text.

SOURCE

Answers to the following questions will give you background information about the SOURCE of the text:

1. What kind of publication is this?
2. What is the author's background in this subject?
3. Who is the intended audience?



INTENT

Answers to the following questions will indicate the author's INTENT (purpose):

1. What did the author hope to accomplish by writing this? Was the goal to amuse, ridicule, arouse sympathy or pity, convince the reader, refute an opponent, prove a point, tell a story, state facts or opinions, etc.?
2. What evidence did the author provide that supports the intent of the text?

ATTITUDE & TONE

Answers to questions like these will indicate the author's ATTITUDE (how the author feels):

1. What are the author's personal feelings about the subject?
2. How does the author feel about the readers?
3. Is the text directed toward mental inferiors, superiors, or equals?
4. Is the author trying to impress the reader with his/her knowledge?

The TONE (the way the author chooses to express himself/herself) can be recognized by answers to questions such as these:

1. What is the tone of the author (e.g., serious, light-hearted, humorous, ironic, sarcastic, logical, emotional, condescending)?
2. What connotations (underlying meanings) do the author's word choices carry?

BIAS

An author's INTENT, ATTITUDE, and TONE will often indicate whether the author is BIASED or objective. Answers to the following questions will help you recognize an author's bias in writing:

1. Considering the topic as a whole, what, if any, factors contain bias?
2. Does the author appear to be one-sided about any of these?
3. Is the author being objective or subjective?
4. Is the author stating fact or opinion?
5. How well are the author's opinions supported? Or are they unsupported?
6. Does the tone of the writing suggest that the author may be biased?

ASSUMPTIONS

Answers to questions like these will indicate the validity of the author's ASSUMPTIONS:

1. Does the author make inconsistent statements?
2. What has the author assumed to be true? Which of these assumptions are stated? Unstated?
3. What does the author imply?



ARGUMENTS

Answers to questions like these will indicate the reasoning behind an ARGUMENT:

1. Is the author trying to get the reader to react emotionally?
2. Which of the author's statements demonstrate the argument?
3. What conclusions does the author reach?
4. Of the author's conclusions, which are justified? Which ones are not justified?
5. Does the author use any logical fallacies?

FINAL THOUGHTS

Remember that critical readers:

1. Do not believe everything they read.
2. Question everything that doesn't make sense to them.
3. Question some things even though these things do make sense to them.
4. Reread when they think they may have missed something.
5. Consider the type of material they are reading before deciding how much weight to give to it.
6. Consider that a reader's perceptions can be affected by an author's writing style and not just the information the author presents.
7. Analyze arguments.
8. Discount arguments based on faulty reasoning.
9. Have good reason for believing some things and disbelieving others—for agreeing with some authors and disagreeing with others.