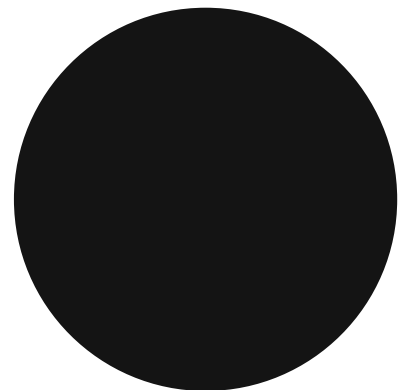


How to Read and Critically Respond to Texts

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You will be required in your courses to read extracts from books, academic papers, and websites. Here are some guidelines for how to approach each text.



How to Read and Critically Respond to Texts

01 / Before you read, you may want to:

- Reflect on what type of text it is. Does it present an argument? Alternatively, is it primarily concerned with description or information delivery? What is its purpose?
- Find out who the author is: male/female? When were they writing? Aligned with what discipline? Institution? Geographically located? Critiqued by?
- Look at the title and think about what you might already know about this subject, what stories do you bring, what is your 'position' already? Recognise that these pre-existing understandings will impact your interpretation of the text, and may cause you to either accept the author's arguments too readily or, conversely, close you to aspects of what is being argued

02 / As you read each text, try to answer the following questions

- What key points or claims are made? Make detailed notes of what you read.
- Look at what kinds of support are given for these key issues and points.
- Is it based on empirical data, reasoned arguments or experience?
- What conclusions has the author drawn?
- Make an appraisal of how tight and well argued the key issues and points are. You may wish to use Toulmin's Method of Argument Analysis to help you judge how well points have been argued. There are many explanations of Toulmin's method online. Here is the URL for an excellent guide prepared by Colorado State University: writing.colostate.edu/guides/guide.cfm

- What terms don't you understand? Are some terms used differently to the way you understand them?
- What theories/strategies has the author used to structure the key issues and points?

03 / When looking at a website, ask yourself:

- Is this website produced by an academic, government, NGO or commercial organisation?
- What is its purpose?
- What kind of information does it make available?
- How well supported is this information? Can it be verified?

04 / How to locate other relevant literature

The required texts will be a good source of further information. When you locate a new text you must read with purpose. This helps you quickly find, appraise and read relevant literature:

- Look at the table of contents.
- Read the abstract.
- Scan the introduction and the conclusion, as well as headings or sub-headings, to see if the text is suitable for your purpose. If the text appears to be relevant, then you should read it in-depth to find specific research to support your review.
- Scan footnotes and endnotes; and follow leads. This will also help you assess the validity of the argument. Is the same research referenced in other sources?

Always record all bibliographic information. If you are quoting the author you will need use quotations and cite the year and page number.

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05 / Evaluate your sources, material and readings

- Ask yourself who conducted the research (is the author an authority in their field of study)? What evidence is there to support this? Look at other footnotes/endnotes, bibliographies.
 - Where has this research come from? Is it a valid source, i.e. from an educational institution, a refereed journal article, or a scholarly book? If it is from a website, does it contain the author's details? Is it from an educational site, and does it have a publication date? If you are doing a Google search you may find non-academic sites that have not been peer assessed.
 - Evaluate the reading. If it is not authoritative, try again. Also try using scholar.google.com instead.
- Is the literature accurate? How do you know this? Is the same research referenced in other academic sources?
 - Is there evidence of bias/prejudice in the article? Is the argument convincing?
 - How do you know if the evidence is true (what kind of backing does the author use)?
 - How up-to-date is the material that you are looking at? Is it likely that more current literature is available? Always include current and up-to-date material in a literature review.
 - Ask yourself how this literature refers to your topic? What is it telling you about it?