Critical reading

When you’re reading you need to ask questions to help you to actively engage with the text and focus on what you’re trying to find out from your reading.

It’s a good idea to think of some questions before you start reading in depth and to keep these in mind as you read. It can also be helpful to add more questions as you read the text and become familiar with the author’s ideas and arguments.

The type of text you are reading will affect the questions you ask. Turn over for some general questions to help you get started.

Make notes before you start reading

Before you begin reading, write down what you already know about the topic, and any questions that initially come to mind. You may find that you know more than you originally thought!

Writing down your initial thoughts helps you to engage with the text as you read. You can refer back to your notes and ask: Do I still think that? Have I found any evidence in this text which supports my initial thoughts? Have I found any evidence which has made me change my opinion?

Resources

For more help critical reading, visit the Skills Hub website or come to a workshop.

www.sussex.ac.uk/skillshub/reading
Read critically and ask questions as you read:

Before you begin reading...

- What do I want to find out?
- What do I think now?
- Why do I think this?

Questioning the writing

- What are the bare bones of the author’s argument?
- How effectively are the author’s ideas evidenced?
- What would I like to ask the author?
- What are the limitations or flaws in the evidence?
- What examples would prove the opposite theory?
- Can the theory be disproved or is it too general?
- Is this convincing? Why/why not?
- What are the implications?
- What are the alternatives?
- Who else has written on the topic?
- What are other writers’ opinions?

Forming your own ideas

- Which bits of the author’s argument do I want to use/reflect on in my essay?
- How does this fit in with my own theory/beliefs?
- How does it fit with the opposite theory/beliefs?
- How does it fit with other relevant theory/beliefs I’ve come across?
- Is my own theory/belief still valid? If so, why?
- Am I surprised? If so, why?
- Do I agree? If so, why?

Your own questions: