

# Effective Academic Reading

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STUDENT LEARNING SUPPORT  
Graduate Student Support



RYERSON  
UNIVERSITY

*Ryerson University sits on the  
Traditional Territory of the  
Mississauga's of New Credit  
First Nation. We are  
honoured to be a part of this  
community of our Indigenous  
colleagues and students.*

*- Chi Miigwetch*



# Learning Outcomes

Better monitor your reading process

Adapt various reading strategies to improve the reading process

Assess what kind of reading style is necessary for each task

# Passive vs. Active Reading:

## Passive reading

- Approaching a text without set goals
- Treating the text democratically

## Active reading

- Having a purpose
- Asking questions of the text
- Thinking about the development and structure of the argument
- Writing in the margins

# Reading

Active Reading

Close Reading

Critical Reading

# Kinds of Reading

## Active Reading

Make annotations relating to the content and meaning of the material  
Restate major points in the margins or on a separate document  
Underline or highlight the things that you deem to be important

## Close Reading

Looking for key ideas, biases, opinions  
Make annotations that record connections between the material you are reading and your prior knowledge and experience

## Critical Reading

Critical reading is about critical thinking.  
This involves asking questions about what you are reading  
To read critically is to look at how the text is written and how the point is argued.

# The Reading Process

## Multi-Stage Process:

Selecting the reading

Pre-Reading

During Reading

Annotations

Note-Taking

Post-Reading

Summarizing

Critiquing

Integrating

# Critical Reading Tip 1

Begin by surveying the material to get an overall sense of the argument

- Scan the article quickly
- Identify what information will be covered.
- Look over section titles, headings and subheadings
- Read the introduction and conclusion



# Critical Reading Tip 2

## Ask questions before reading

- What do I know about the author?
- When was this text written?
- How does this text relate to the topic of my paper?
- How do I hope to make use of this text in my paper?

# Critical Reading Tip 3

Turn headings and sub-headings into questions that guide your reading.

Heading:

“Pleasure and Fear: Ideology and Advertising”

Questions:

What is the relationship between pleasure and fear in Advertising? How are pleasure and fear related to ideology?

# Critical Reading Tip 4

## Use your margins

- Next to each paragraph, use a few words to summarize its controlling idea.
- Enter into a dialogue with the author; ask questions of the text.
- Mark twists or turns in the argument.
  
- Note: Try not to underline too much of your text;
- highlight specific passages you intend to
- quote after reading the whole text.

# Critical Reading Tip 5

## Engage difficult vocabulary

- Allow yourself time to unpack difficult sentences
- Pay attention to how difficult sentences fit into the larger paragraph
- Keep a dictionary nearby
  
- Note: Ignoring difficult sentences and words can
- confuse your understanding of an author's argument.

# Critical Reading Tip 6

## Examine the Endnotes

- What sources has this author cited?
- Are you familiar with any of them?
- Can any of them be of use to you in your research and writing?

# Critical Reading Tip 7

## Write up Reading Notes

- In your own words, summarize the argument of the text you have written.
- Make notes about key ideas or concepts you may be able to use in your writing.
- Draw links between this text and others you have read.
- Highlight any holes or weaknesses.
- Outline how you might make use of the argument in formulating your own perspective on the topic.

# Critical Reading and Writing

How does Critical Reading contribute to better writing?

- It makes our reading active rather than passive
- It focuses our attention and energy
- It saves time (studying and writing)
- It engages us in critical thinking
- It helps us to understand argumentation
- It draws our attention to flow and structure in the writing process

# What is Critical Thinking?

## Definition

The ability to discern the validity and authority of an argument through reason and logic.

## Two main processes

Analysis

Synthesis



# Pre-reading Strategies

- Consider what you already know about the topic
- Decide what you want to learn about the topic
- Decide what you want to learn from each specific article
- Predict what information the article will tell you
- Think ahead to how you will use the information you gather in your own work

# Reading Strategies 1

## Preview and Predict

Give the text a quick once over and try to guess at what is to come

## Specify Purpose

Figure out why you are being asked to read the text

## Ask Questions

Ask questions and develop a dialogue with the author

# Reading Strategies 2

## Recognize Topics

Use what you know to find out what the text is about

## Classify ideas into main topics and details

Figure out the arguments/ideas and the supporting evidence

## Recognize structure and organization

Figure out the outline of the article

# Reading Strategies 3

## Guess the meaning of unknown words

Look at the sentence and the paragraph to try to guess the meaning of the word

## Read for keywords only

Get a sense of the article by skimming only for keywords

## Skim

Glance at an article quickly to get a sense of what it is about

# Reading Strategies 4

## Paraphrase

Restate some of the text in your own words to make sure that you are understanding it

## Summarize

Restate some of the text in a shorter version in your own words to make sure that you have understood it

## Visualize

Drawing a picture or flow chart may help to understand the ideas

# Post Reading Strategies

- Consider what new information has been learned
- Did you understand all of the aspects of the research?
- Were your research goals met?
- What sections will you incorporate into your research?
- Finalize your notes.
- Summarize, paraphrase, and quote essential parts of the text with the citation for future use

# Reading Academic Articles 1

- Reading articles effectively is a combination of knowing how they are organized and being able to understand what they are saying.
- Critical reading is not simply sitting back and letting the author tell you information. It is also thinking critically through the information that (s)he is telling you.

# Reading Academic Articles 2

- Understanding essay and article structure will help you to better read the articles
- Knowing where the point, proof, and explanations should be in an academic paper, will help you to find them in the article faster
- In other words, good reading skills and good writing skills go hand-in-hand



# Organization of Academic Articles

Abstract

Introduction

(Literature Review, background knowledge, definition of key terms)

Methods

Arguments

Discussion

Implications of findings

Conclusions

Future research

# Definition

“A research report gives the history of the study, including what the researcher wanted to find out and why it seemed worth discovering, how he or she gathered the information, and what he or she thought it all meant”

(Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2010, p. 16).

# Critical Characteristics

## A Research Report:

- states a question or problem to be investigated.
- relates the question and purpose of the study to existing knowledge.
- usually gives the theoretical basis of the investigation.
- explains how the data was collected.

# A Research Report:

- gives evidence that the appropriate level of accuracy was achieved.
- shows that the data are of sufficiently high quality.
- explains how the data were analyzed.
- The results of data analysis are explicitly related to the research question or problem.
- clearly relates the results of data analysis to the research question.
- reports conclusions about the findings as being tentative.
- indicates the limitations of the study and shows other ways to account for the findings.
- is peer reviewed.

# Check for Reliability

- Is the author a respected member of the knowledge community?
- Is the journal respected in the field?
- Is the funding agency well known for this type of research?
- Are the data reliable?

# Problems Diminishing Reliability

- Problems with methodology
- Problems with replication
- Conflicts of interest
- Carelessness
- Poor scholarship

# Check for Validity

## Internal validity:

The study deals with what it claims to study  
Offers a well supported thesis

## External validity:

The study can be generalized to other participants, settings, materials,  
etc.  
Has a relationship to research beyond the article

# Types of Research

## Quantitative

concerned with quantities, involves numerical measurements. The investigator is invisible and is not part of the investigation.

## Qualitative

concerned with qualities, involves personal assessments. The investigator is visible and is a part of the investigation.

## Mixed

Elements of quantitative and qualitative methods may be combined in some studies.



# Quantitative vs. Qualitative

|                            | <b>Quantitative</b>             | <b>Qualitative</b>                             |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Results</b>             | Reported as numbers             | Reported as words                              |
| <b>Investigator</b>        | Concerned with objectivity      | Concerned with subjectivity                    |
| <b>Reality</b>             | Distinct from subjective states | Dependent on subjective states                 |
| <b>Participants</b>        | Random sample                   | No sampling                                    |
| <b>Objects of research</b> | Physical objects                | Minds, meanings, understandings, beliefs, etc. |

# Purpose

## Qualitative:

To understand a situation from the position of the participant (interpretive)

To understand and critique power within society (critical theory)

## Quantitative:

To describe a sample on a specific variable (descriptive)

To describe relationships among variables (correlational)

To test differences in group means for one or more independent variable (experimental)

# Common Forms of Research

## Qualitative:

- Interpretive
- Critical Theory

## Quantitative:

- Descriptive
- Correlational
- (Quasi-)Experimental

# Common Forms of Research: Qualitative

## Interpretive:

Ethnographic, Constructivist, Phenomenological, Grounded Theory, Hermeneutics, Case Study, etc.

## Critical Theory:

Feminist, Marxist, Critical Ethnography, Deconstruction, Post-Modernism, Post-Structuralism, etc.

# Common Forms of Research: Quantitative

## Descriptive:

Survey, Polling, Delphi Survey

## Correlational:

Predictive, Multiple Regression, Causal Modelling, Path Analysis, etc.

## (Quasi-)Experimental:

Causal Comparative, Repeated Measure Design, Randomized Block Design, etc.

# Examples of Research Techniques

## Qualitative:

Observation and use of field notes, examination of documents, interviews (interpretive)

Analysis of print materials, popular culture and social structures, documentation of empowerment activities, often using interpretive techniques (critical theory)

## Quantitative:

Data collection with instrumentation for specific variables, paper and pencil inventories, surveys, use of statistics to analyze data.

# Participants/Subjects

## Qualitative:

How does the researcher situate themselves?

Who is the author studying?

How does the author relate to this group?

How was the sample decided upon?

## Quantitative:

Who is the researcher?

How was the sample decided upon?

# Qualitative Research Format

The format of qualitative research is more flexible than that of quantitative research.

Paradigms:

Interpretive Research

(Study the context for social action from the participants' point of view.)

Grounded Theory Studies

(Develop a theory, based on a study.)



# Qualitative Research Format (continued)

## Generic Studies

(Identify a model or framework, collect and analyze information leading to conclusions related to the framework.)

## Phenomenological Studies

(Examine a concept from the participants' point of view.)

## Ethnographic Studies

(Study individual or group values.)

# Contents of Qualitative Reports

- Describes what the study is about
- Answers the question, “Where were the data collected?”
- Answers questions about what was done, who did it, why it was done, how it was done, and why it matters.
- Presents the data.
- Presents one or more conclusions.
- The literature review may be scattered throughout the report and not collected in one section.

# Critically Assessing & Interpreting Research Reports

## Citation:

Record your citation for future reference.

## Purpose and General Rational:

Determine the purpose of the study  
What problem is raised?

## Fit and Specific Rational:

What specific field is the article situated in?  
What contribution does this study make?

## Context:

Where does the study take place?  
What are important variables and characteristics?

# Critically Assessing & Interpreting Research Reports 2

## Steps in Sequence:

In the order performed, what were the main procedural steps in the study?

Describe or diagram in a flowchart the relationship between steps

## Data Types:

What is constituted as data?

How is it collected?

## Data Analysis:

What form of data analysis was used?

What specific questions was the data analysis designed to answer?

# Critically Assessing & Interpreting Research Reports 3

## Results:

- What did the researcher identify as the primary results?
- What other information arose as part of the research process?

## Conclusions:

- What information was discovered?
- Did the research support the case made in the literature review?

## Cautions:

- What biases or problems does the researcher raise?
- What problems do you see in the research?

## Discussion:

- What was learned from the report?
- What findings from the report were surprising?

# Review

- Reading is a multi-stage process
- Understanding essay structure and how articles are written will help you to better read the articles
- Knowing where the point, proof, and explanations should be in an academic paper, will help you to find them in the article faster.
- Good reading skills and good writing skills go hand-in-hand

# Source

Based on: Locke, L., Silverman, S., & Spirduso, W. (2010). Reading and Understanding Research (3rd. ed.). Los Angeles, Sage.

# Graduate Student Support

- One-on-one tutorial sessions to help students with writing and referencing during any stage of the process.
- Two 50-minute appointments per week.
- Online workshops on a variety of graduate writing-related topics.
- Useful guides and resources on the website.
- Be sure to make an appointment on our website a week or two before your desired date as spots fill up quickly.

4<sup>th</sup> floor, Student Learning Centre

[Visit Student Learning Support website](#)

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