

Critical Reading

Study Guide

When reading journals, books, websites, or other resources you come across, you need to be critical of what you read. In other words, whether you are using online or print resources, all material is subject to evaluation.

It is important to keep in mind that authors are human beings; that being said, their writings may be influenced by their worldviews, personal experience, the events that occurred when the text was written, among many others. Therefore, you should always assess the text at hand.

Critical reading strategies help you make informed judgements about what you read to acquire relevant and accurate information/evidence for your assignments.

Step 1: Evaluate the source of information.

Checking the credibility and accuracy of your source is a crucial step. Before you read into the text itself, always evaluate whether this source is reliable or not.

Our library staff have prepared a detailed guide on [evaluating websites](https://tafesalibraryguides.com/evaluatingwebsites). This guide is very useful for assessing any source at hand. Before proceeding, go to <https://tafesalibraryguides.com/evaluatingwebsites> for advice on how to complete this step.

Step 2: Identify your reading purpose.

After you have determined that your source is credible, consider the purpose of reading the text. Once you identify *why* you're reading this text, you can determine its relevance for your assignment. Consider the reasons below:

- Acquire general information.
- Collect data/evidence.
- Understand a specific theme, topic, or idea.
- Understand the author's/authors' point of view.
- Support your argument(s) or view(s) (referencing).

Step 3: Get to know the author(s).

Knowing the author will help you determine the relevance and reliability of the text you intend to read. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are they field experts?
- What area(s) are they specialized in?
- Are they known in the field or cited often? What is their credibility in the industry?
- What work(s) have they published? What previous research have they conducted?
- Is their work peer-reviewed?

Always do a background check on the author. Sometimes, the author's background can reveal a lot about their viewpoints; even the time when they wrote the paper can help determine what influenced their thoughts

and research. Even renowned academic authors adjust their claims in time with the advancement in technology and research. You can use any search engine to familiarize yourself with them and their work.

Step 4: Identify the objectives of the text.

Just like you read a text for a reason, authors write to serve a specific purpose as well. Texts can be informative, persuasive, case studies, review articles, research, analytical, methodology, clinical studies, and critical. There are different strategies to consider for each type. Here are some general tips to help you critically assess the source:

- Confirm the data provided is accurate. Academic texts always reference their information. If the author(s) did not base their findings on a thorough study in the paper you're reading, always look for the source the data was taken from; confirm that the data is not misplaced or misinterpreted.
- Check whether the information is up to date. Has the data changed since the text was published? Are these statistics still relevant today?
- Refer to the sources cited in the text you're reading to ensure the idea has been conveyed properly.
- If you don't understand key terms or ideas, resort to other sources or the original source.
- Refer to the reference list or bibliography at the end of the source you're reading to expand your knowledge on that topic.
- If the text aims to persuade, make sure to research the opposing arguments. Does the paper you're reading provide opposing arguments? If yes, refer to the cited sources to confirm that there are no misinterpretations or exaggerations of the argument. If the opposing arguments aren't presented, consider why the author has not included them; on what basis are they supporting their view? Do they have the needed resources/data to back up their claims?
- Inspect the parameters of the study and assess possible limitations. The approach can be qualitative, quantitative, or both. When we talk about parameters, we take into account the targeted sample, the location(s) in which the study was conducted, the conditions, questionnaires or surveys used, the timeline or duration of the study, and the tools used. Consider how these factors can influence the findings. Is the sampling biased to support the author(s) claim(s), or have they gathered sufficient data to back up their findings? Assess the word choice in the questionnaires, or surveys; are the words misleading or confusing, or could they be misinterpreted?
- When reading case studies, evaluate whether their significance is qualitative or quantitative. Do the authors need a large sampling for this specific research, or is the data still relevant if the quantitative aspect is not met?

Further help:

Learn more online by visiting <https://tafesa.libguides.com/myinfoskills/evaluatorresources>.

For additional study help, reach out to a learning advisor. [Click here](#) to book an appointment, pass by your campus' Study Hub, or visit <https://students.tafesa.edu.au/getting-help/study-hubs>.