

Critical Reading of Argumentative Texts

Read the text once for

- General understanding
- Clarification of context (time, place, etc.)
- Basic personal reactions

*Read the text a **second time** to delve more deeply into it.* Consider some of the following questions to help you with **basic understanding and interpretation**:

1. What problems did you have with this reading? What didn't you understand? (Be honest; no one always understands everything.) Were there any words, references, or allusions that you didn't get?
2. Related to #1, spend some additional time highlighting those unfamiliar references, allusions, and words. Look up as many of these as possible, and jot down what you find in the margins. Highlight those you don't get to for group discussion.
3. What is the author's background? Does he or she have impressive or at least decent credentials to write on the subject, or not? *
4. What do you take to be the writer's purpose?
5. Who seems to be the intended audience?
6. What particular methods does the writer use to develop those premises? (for ex, comparison/contrast, narration, rational argumentation, etc.)
7. With what (if anything) do you disagree? Why?
8. What did you learn from this reading that you didn't know before?

**Compare an article with impressive/clear author credentials to one whose author credibility seems shakier. What do you notice?*

Now consider other questions to help you with **drawing inferences/forming judgments**:

1. What assumptions or other unstated "givens" seem to form the basis of this text? That is, does the author assume you know the subject as well as s/he knows it? Does the author assume you share any of his/her values? Are these assumptions acceptable/reasonable or more arguable/objectionable?
2. Is the subject matter more conducive to **fact or opinion**?
3. Can you clearly distinguish between the writer's use of **fact and opinion**?
4. If you disagree with the author on any point, is your disagreement a visceral/gut-reaction one? Something that you can back up with logic or experience?

Finally, consider some questions to help you **evaluate and analyze** the text:

1. Has the writer failed to tell you anything you wish you knew? If so, what?
2. What, if anything, did the author do especially well?
3. What do you wish the author might have done instead?
4. What, if anything, do you think was not sufficiently developed or clarified?
5. Consider a certain technique of the author's whose use confuses or even irritates you. Pretend to be the author for a few minutes, and try to come up with some speculations on why s/he used that certain technique the way s/he did.
6. If you were this author's intended audience, how thoroughly would s/he have reached you?