



# CRITICAL READING

## OVERVIEW

The beginning of all critical and creative thinking starts with assessing and questioning existing information. Challenging students to be independent, critical, and thoughtful readers is a fundamental stepping stone in life-long learning. Critical reading encourages students to synthesize complex arguments, back up claims with evidence, question the authority of the text and author, and suggest alternative explanations. Most importantly, it encourages them to be active participants in the learning process.

## CRITICAL READING ACTIVITIES

The main components of the critical reading worksheet ask students to synthesize, support, evaluate, and argue. Below is an example of the questions that you might use to guide how students engage in critical reading. These questions can be answered individually or in groups, using one of the collaborative learning techniques outlined on that resource sheet.

Critical reading worksheets can also be used in conjunction with synthesis matrices or can be the structure students use for their entries into that format. The main components of the critical reading worksheet follow.

- 1. Assess the background and context for the reading.** Who is the author? What is his/her background? What makes the author qualified to write this piece? How old is the article/book? Is it timely? Who is publishing and/or paying for this article or book? Why is that relevant and what impact might that have on the content?
- 2. Synthesize the main idea of a text.** Ask students to explain the main point of the text in a few sentences. This is not just a summary (i.e. first the author said this and then they said that) but should explain the argument that the author is making.
- 3. Identify two or more things that the author does to support the main point.** Make sure to explain how the author is supporting the the main point (i.e. by analyzing X piece of information, defining Y, or comparing A to B).
- 4. Provide a 1- or 2-sentence quotation that the author uses as evidence to support his/her main point.** Be sure to include a reference to the page where it appears in the source.
- 5. What is the aim of the author in addressing this topic?** What is the author's stance? How does the author's background qualify him/her to write on this topic, and how might it affect the position that the author has taken? Who is the target audience? How can you tell?
- 6. What are the strongest and weakest parts of his/her argument?** Refer to specific passages. Explain why you thought they were strong or weak. Give page numbers.
- 7. What is your overall assessment of the author's work and treatment of the subject?** Based on the analysis and reflection above, write a single statement articulating your overall critical perspective on how effectively the author treats the topic in attempting to achieve his/her overall purpose.

## READINGS & RESOURCES

Bean, John. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. Jossey-Bass, 2011.

Doyle, Terry. *Learner-Centered Teaching: Putting the Research on Learning into Practice*. Stylus, 2011.

See also: **Writing to Think and Synthesis Matrix** at <https://think.dasa.ncsu.edu>