

Seminar

WHAT WE SEE & MAKE SEEN

Critical Reading

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Reading texts is key to get other points of view and to understand arguments. The following steps and questions might be helpful to classify and memorize texts.

A. Around text and author

- What type of text is it? Scientific, journalistic or popular text? Literature, other...
- What style and rhetoric is used?
- What does the text consist of? Descriptions, examples, theoretical arguments, fiction, other...
- Who is the author? From what context is he/she writing? background? motivation?
- What is the publication context? Journal, reader, new paper, blog, ...
- What assumptions and expectations do you bring to this text?

B. While reading

- Take notes! Avoid highlighters! While reading take notes either in the margins or on a separate sheet.
- Excerpt. Put the ideas of the text in your own words.
- Simply highlighting helps to memorize the ideas of the text as facts, putting them into your own words encourages thinking of them as arguments.

While reading, ask yourself questions like:

- How is the text structured? Does this structure help to understand?
- Does the author adequately defend his/her argument? What kind of proof does he/she use?
- What are the author's assumptions?
- What contradictions do you find in the text?
- Do I agree with the author? Why: yes or no?
- What is left out? Does putting this in disturb his/her argument?
- Can you eventually detect a hidden agenda of the author?

C. How to find the key argument/key thesis

- Read the text once more. What is interesting, enjoying, unexpected, troubling?
- What do you consider as key passages? Key arguments? Why are they important?
- How do they relate to the rest of the text to convey the author's meaning?
- Write down questions you still have about the text. Evaluate these questions:
—> check the interesting ones and look for patterns among your questions; such patterns can help you to discover your specific interest in the text and to outline your position.

D. Critical review

Present your arguments and impressions. Find an adequate form to refer to the text and to point out your position.