



Critical Thinking and Active Reading

Important notice:



At the end of this presentation there is a link to a Microsoft Forms quiz. You must score an 80% or higher to pass the quiz.

Please take your time viewing and studying this material before you proceed with the quiz.

Objectives

- Define critical thinking
- Provide strategies for thinking critically
- Make inferences and synthesize evidence
- Define active reading
- Demonstrate effective active reading techniques
- Analyze literary passages

Hook: Why do children ask “why”?

The naturally curious nature of children regularly compels them to understand the world around them through exploration and inquiry. This helps them establish their world view because it allows them to make sense of what they encounter and perceive daily. Conversely, adults tend to forget this seminal curiosity because they rely on common sense and empirical evidence. However, to think critically, it is essential that we recover the inquisitive minds we had as children that often asked ‘why’.

Critical Thinking

What is *critical thinking*?

“Critical thinking” is a way of reflecting upon what we **think, see, read** and **hear** in order to intellectually broaden our horizons. When we think critically, we seek information and raise relevant questions that enrich our understanding of the text and the experience of reading overall.

How can one *think critically*?

- ❑ “Everyone thinks; it is our nature to do so. But much of our thinking, left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed or down-right prejudiced.”
(Paul & Elder 2)
- ❑ When thinking critically, we need to become more **aware** of our biases and prejudices. After all, it is easy to say whether we like something or not, if it is good or bad. Instead, we should try to see things in a new light by constantly questioning ourselves and the sources that offer information.

Why think *critically*?

In an era of digital media, fake news and global turmoil, it becomes urgent to be able to view the world from a conscious and critical perspective.

Developing critical thinking skills will help us to:

- ✓ raise questions
- ✓ analyze texts
- ✓ consult sources
- ✓ develop a point of view
- ✓ examine discourses
- ✓ prove our arguments
- ✓ assess relevant information
- ✓ broaden our perspectives

Reasoning as Process

Reasoning is an effort to figure something out, to answer a question or solve a problem. Here are some pointers:



State the topic or problem. Start by raising a clear and direct question.



Divide the initial question into smaller questions. Distinguish between those that can be answered with concrete evidence and those cannot.



Identify your presumptions (or the author's) and determine if they are justified.



Assess the author's point of view and your own. Consider any possible objections that can be made to refute them.



Corroborate your claim (or the author's) with the data that supports it and determine its relevance to the argument.

Arguments and Opinions

According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, an **'argument'** is “a reason or set of reasons that someone uses to show that something is true or correct.” Whereas an **'opinion'** is defined as: “feelings about somebody/something, rather than a fact.”

This distinction is essential when it comes to thinking critically. Critical thinkers do not rely on opinions, personal feelings, or individual bias to arrive at conclusions. Rather, they support their point of view based on facts and solid arguments that prove the veracity of their statements.

Evidence and Inference



Inference

- What we consider possible or probable. It resembles a hypothesis and, if we want to prove it, we must show its validity through verifiable evidence.

The validity of an argument is proven through the reasoning and evidence that supports it.

Evidence

- The reasons that support the inference in question. It must be verifiable.

Warm-up Exercise

Observe the following
image attentively...



The Third of May 1808 by Francisco de Goya (1914)

After you have seen the image...

- A. Describe the painting (characters, setting, colors, perspective, etc.).
- B. Make inferences based on what you see considering the following questions:
 1. What emotions does this painting evoke in you and why?
 2. What is the difference between the body language of the armed and the unarmed men?
 3. What could the contrast of light suggest?



The Third of May 1808 by Francisco de Goya (1914)

Active Reading

A Critical Tool

What is Active Reading?

Also known as *close reading*, is a way of engaging a text with a critical mindset. When reading actively, we intend to comprehend and evaluate the message of a source thoroughly. Here are some tips:

Before reading...

- ❑ Before you get right into reading, do some **research about the text**. Search for **biographical facts** about the author and **his/her literary career**. This will give you a **general idea** of the text and **some insight about the writer's point of view**.
- ❑ After you have done some research, get settled! Find a quiet and comfortable place to read. Remember to gather your tools and keep a **dictionary** close!
- ❑ Examine the **title** closely. What **inferences** can be made about it?

While reading...

- ❑ Pay attention to **the voice of the text** and determine **the tone of the author**. This will help you assess its **purpose**.
- ❑ Notice how the text works! Underline the **main idea** of each paragraph and identify the **details** that support it. Observe how its organization helps convey the message.
- ❑ **Highlight** and **underline** important passages and keywords. This will help you during your second read!
- ❑ Annotate your first impressions, specially on those passages that spoke to you personally or that you believe you could comment on.

After reading...

- ❑ **Think** about what you read. Imagine you are going to tell someone about the text, what comes to mind?
- ❑ **Summarize** the text. Ascertain its **thesis** and **central concepts**.
According to your reading, determine what the message of the author is.
- ❑ Make an **outline** of the text. Identify its introduction and conclusion.
Review each passage in order and extract its main ideas and supporting details.
- ❑ **Reread** it for a deeper knowledge. A second read will clear up any doubts and stimulate you to engage in a profounder conversation with the author.

Shooting an Elephant

By George Orwell

You can find the text here: <https://bit.ly/3lrj0oV>

In the following slides you will read and analyze a passage from George Orwell's essay "Shooting an elephant". During this exercise, you must engage the text critically by employing **active reading** techniques.

Before reading...

The Author: George Orwell (1903-1950)



Born Eric Arthur Blair in British India, George Orwell was an English writer and journalist. He is widely recognized as a novelist and is best known for *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Orwell's non-fiction works include essays on politics, literature, culture and language.

His essay “Shooting an Elephant” (1936) narrates his experience as an English police officer in Moulmein, Burma.

Before reading...

The Setting: Burma, 1922

During Orwell's time, Burma, now Myanmar, was a British colony in Southeast Asia. In 1922, the author joined the Imperial Police and was assigned to a post in Moulmein, one of Burma's largest cities.



Before reading...

The Theme

Much of the essay's descriptions portray the sneering way the narrator (a police officer) is perceived by the local people (colonial subjects). Since he himself is against the British's imperial rule, he struggles to conciliate his disapproval of imperialism and his despise for the locals who insult him at every turn.

“All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible.” (Orwell)

Before reading...

The Plot

The narrator of “Shooting an Elephant” recounts the events leading up to the killing of an elephant by his own hand. One day, he is called to attend a problem regarding a rampant elephant in the city. Although he initially brings a rifle with him to scare off the animal, the locals expect him to kill it. When he faces the elephant, he also finds himself facing the internal struggle of whether he should do what he believes is right (to spare the elephant) or do what the locals are expecting of him (to shoot it).

While reading...

Exercise: Active Reading in Action

- Identify the **message** the narrator is conveying.
- Observe how the **structure** and **vocabulary** work together. Look up the words in bold and analyze how their meanings construe the message.
- Determine what the **tone** of the author is.
- **Engage** the text personally by imagining yourself in the narrator's position.

Read the following passage...

Remember to practice **active reading** strategies while reading!

“And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man’s dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd – seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the “natives,” and so in every crisis he has got to do what the “natives” expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant.” (Orwell)

After reading...

Exercise: Active Reading in Action

After reading the previous passage, answer the following questions:

1. What is the main idea of the paragraph?
2. What is the tone of the text?
3. What is the conflict the narrator is facing?
4. If you had to describe the conflict as man vs. self, what textual evidence would you use to prove it?

References

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After completing the module, click on the following link to take the quiz and send the report to your professor:

<https://forms.office.com/r/F1NduwtmdS>

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