



READ BACKWARDS

We can break down critical thinking into 4 sections: describing, analysing, evaluating and reflecting. From the order of these we see a deepening structure to thinking, starting with describing, moving through reviewing and analysing and ending with assessing and evaluating. This is the critical-thinking model designed by Plymouth University - a useful model for ordering questions. We can also add in a final layer of reflection - making the critique personal. This gives a model that I call READ Backwards because that is the order of the 4 categories organised in reverse but also because when we apply critical thinking to an academic text we are reading we don't always want to just read straight through. We may want to go backwards to cover the arguments again so we can gain a deeper understanding of its meaning.

Describe - These questions help you to restate what the author is saying but they don't show that you understand in any depth what the text is about.

Analyse - Examine methodically and in detail for the purposes of explanation or interpretation. This looks at methodology as well as evidence to support the argument, the causes, theories and evidence. This stage is about developing deeper thinking.

Evaluate - Form an idea of the amount, number, value or quality of. Judge the text - is it right in its argument? What do you think about it? What is your position on the subject? How does this compare/relate to other texts on the subject?

Review/Reflect - This is a useful step when personal opinions matter - for example in action research.

The key to critical thinking is to ask questions. Here are some questioning words which fit each level of the model:

Describe	Analyse	Evaluate	Review/Reflect
What? Where? Who? When?	How? Why? Is this reliable? What caused this? What theories link to this?	What If? So What? What Next? What do I think about this? What is my position on the subject? How does this compare/relate to other texts?	I Felt/Noticed/ Discovered/Realised
These questions are for describing and restating. They don't explore deep into a text's meaning	This examines the text to give interpretations and explanations.	This helps to form an idea about the meaning, judging the text and questioning the position of the author.	This is a useful step when personal opinions matter - for example in action research

When starting to question, it is a good idea to discover how we have already formed judgments, for example musical taste: Why do we love/hate a certain artist? Analysing how we formed those judgments can help us to learn which questions we have already considered. Is our judgment informed or have we based it on something with little or no information other than personal taste. If we look at something we dislike in music and ask analytical and evaluative questions can we see some good points? Does this help us to see why other people might like it? Does this now give it some value? Once we have started to look at our previous judgments we can apply it to new knowledge.

When you are writing, always check to see if you are only making descriptive comments. Look to see where you could be more analytical., evaluative and reflective.

RESOURCES

Plymouth University Critical Thinking Study Guide

https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/1/1710/Critical_Thinking.pdf (accessed 11/7/19)