

Critical Reading, Thinking and Analysis Tips

Generate many thoughts first, and then figure out which ones are better.

Strategies for generating lots of ideas:

- Brainstorm about the question and everything you think of related to it.
- Think of as many examples as you can that support or don't support the arguments.
- Brainstorm theories you could use to discuss the question or theories that wouldn't work in addressing the question.
- Try comparing the situation/idea/argument to something else. How do things relate to each other, to your experience?
- Try thinking about the issues from another perspective – how would you explain this to people from another time period, or class, or continent, or of a different age or gender? How might they respond?

Use a combination of these methods to generate ideas and then pinpoint what is most interesting and what you want to look at in more detail.

Follow up the few main ideas you would like to pursue, and only give the minimum amount of background information (i.e. summaries of other people's work) needed to understand your argument.

Take out any information that isn't relevant to the key ideas you are discussing.

Critical questions to ask of a reading (Pitt, 2006)

- Why does this matter?
- How does this relate to other arguments and readings?
- Where does it stand in the wider debates?
- What have I gained from reading it?
- What are its strengths?
- What criticisms do I have?
- In whose interests does it seem to be? Do I share that position?
- Why/why not?
- How does it help me?
- How does it advance my own thesis/argument?

Analysing the text (Elder, 2009)

- What is the author's fundamental purpose?
- What is the author's point of view with respect to the issue?
- What assumptions is the author making in his or her reasoning?
- What are the implications of the author's reasoning?
- What information does the author use in reasoning through this issue?
- What are the most fundamental inferences or conclusions in the article?
- What are the most basic concepts used by the author?
- What is the key question the author is trying to answer?

Responding to other people's work (Graff, 2003: 171)

- *Disagree* with some key statement
- *Agree* with something the critic says and then say even more about it than he or she did
- Point to something the critic says that seems *to go contrary* to something else he or she says
- Point to something the critic says and give a *counter example* from the text
- Argue with the critic by showing that he or she is *leaving out* some key aspect of the story or some key issue or argument
- Blow your critic out of the water by showing that he or she is *totally wrong*
- Praise your critic for making an extremely important point, and *add something* to that point

(Hounsell, 1984)	Analytic Exercise instructions	Likely Marks
Arrangement	1. Summarize other people's ideas	Mostly data: 3 rd , lower 2.2
Viewpoint	2. Your opinions and examples	Data and some interpretation: upper 2.2, lower 2.1
Argument	3. Reflect critically	Argument where a general statement based on your ideas is supported by data, opinions, examples: upper 2.1, 1 st

Bibliography

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Compiled by Allison Hui, a.hui@lancaster.ac.uk, January 2010