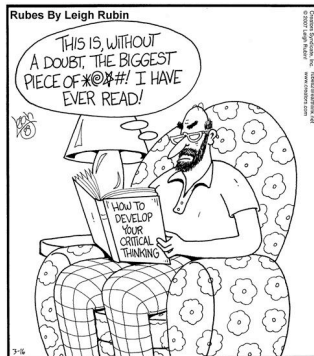


Critical Thinking and Reading/Critical Reading Response (CRR) Guidelines



In English, and in most college courses, you will be asked to think critically, which mainly involves two steps: analyzing and drawing conclusions; however, it also means to go beyond the surface level of a subject and ask the more difficult questions. This handout will explain (first) how to write the Critical Reading Response (CRR), followed by a brief overview of critical thinking, and finally, some critical reading strategies, all of which will help you to write an effective CRR.

Critical Reading Response Instructions:

You will be responsible for writing multiple Critical Reading Responses throughout the semester. You will not write a response for every reading, but only those that are designated on the course calendar. The main purpose of these responses is to improve your ability to analyze and critically think about a text.

Once you have read, annotated, and possibly summarized the reading, you are ready to respond to it in a critical manner. **The Critical Reading Response has two parts: The Rhetorical Précis & the Elaboration.**

The Rhetorical Précis is a succinct, highly-structured, four-sentence paragraph (the guidelines are on a separate handout on Blackboard/Canvas) that analyzes four-five aspects of the reading. We will be going over this in detail during class.

The second part of the CRR is called the “Elaboration,” which is a more, in-depth analysis than the précis. It’s also more of a personal response to the reading and a way for you to engage in a “conversation” with the writer. So, whereas the Précis is limited to a very concise analysis, the Elaboration can be more open-ended, emotionally-driven, and doesn’t have to follow a strict formula. To help you formulate the Elaboration, I listed some questions below. You can also go into more detail about the elements you mention in the précis such as the thesis, evidence, or audience.

Questions to help you write your Elaboration:

- Why type of thesis does the writer use? Is it explicit or implied? Explain.
- Have you experienced anything similar to the author’s experiences? If so, explain or describe. You could go into a brief narrative as well.

- What do you think about the evidence/support? Is it reliable or unreliable? Does the author use enough support? What would make the reading more convincing or engaging?
- Are there certain ideas, phrases, statistics, evidence, or specific quotes that grab your attention? Why?
- Do you think the author uses an acceptable organization? Is it chronological, order of importance, comparison, contrast, or a combination of the above, etc?
- Do you agree or disagree with any of the author's opinions or ideas? Why? You could even write a "letter" to the author to express your thoughts on the topic.
- What types of audiences would appreciate this type of writing or topic? How can you tell?
- Does anything seem odd, surprising, or unrealistic? How so?
- What types of appeals (logical, ethical, emotional) does the writer use to persuade you?
- Are there any logical fallacies or gaps in reasoning?

--Don't worry too much if you are unfamiliar with some of these terms, as we will be covering them throughout the class. **Also, when you write your Elaboration, it doesn't need to answer every question but it should be organized/written in a natural way. Finally, just another reminder: do not over-summarize.**

--Ultimately, when you write any type of response, you should always use specific examples from the text to support your assertions, arguments, points. Therefore, you should quote, elucidate (to explain or clarify something), explore (to make a careful investigation or study of a subject) ideas, themes or concepts in the text.

--Finally, in your Elaboration, it is appropriate to use "I," especially if you are telling a story or giving personal experience. *However*, avoid using unnecessary phrases such as "I feel" or "I believe" or "In my opinion." These are wordy and redundant.

Other CRR Requirements: The total word count (including the Précis and Elaboration) should be between 300-500 words. The CRR must be typed, double-spaced, and formatted in MLA style. **You must submit your CRR to Blackboard/Canvas before the class it is due as well as hand in a hard copy on the day it is due. CRRs will not be accepted late.** They are worth a possible 25 pts.

Grading Rubric:

√+ (25/25): Goes above and beyond expectations, reflects a deep understanding of the material, is written in a clear, logical and organized manner, and has minimal grammatical, spelling, and mechanical errors.

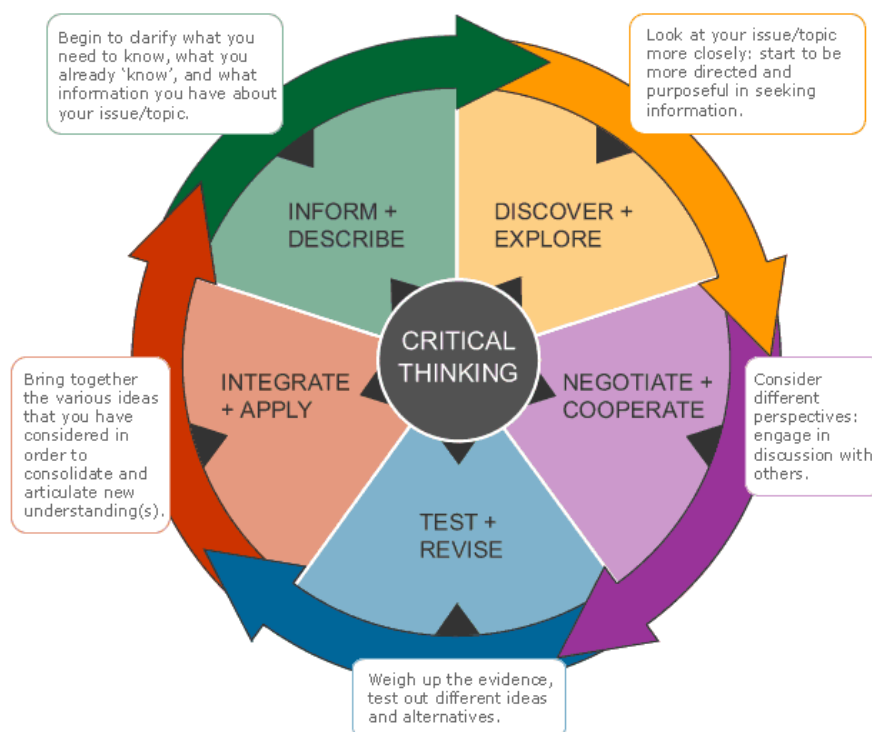
√ (20/25): Shows a reasonable understanding of the material, is organized in an understandable manner, and has some grammatical, mechanical, and spelling errors. Essentially, the writer needs to show more effort.

√- (15/25): Demonstrates a minimal understanding of the material, is organized in a scattered or confusing manner, has a number of grammatical, mechanical, and spelling errors, and essentially shows a minimal effort or is short of the required word amount.

Last Suggestions:

- Make sure to edit, spell check and grammar check your CRR.
- Though these reading responses are pretty formal, you can still have fun and be creative; express your personality
- This is in the realm of academia, so avoid using slang, text message language, and profanity
- When referring to an author, either address him by his full name or last name, never just his first name
- Titles of articles should be quoted while books and magazines should be italicized

Overview of Critical Thinking:



A SUPER-STREAMLINED CONCEPTION OF CRITICAL THINKING

Developed (last revised 11/26/10) by Robert H. Ennis, rhennis@illinois.edu.

A Critical Thinker:

1. Is open-minded and mindful of alternatives
2. Desires to be, and is, well-informed
3. Judges well the credibility of sources
4. Identifies reasons, assumptions, and conclusions
5. Asks appropriate clarifying questions
6. Judges well the quality of an argument, including its reasons, assumptions, evidence, and their degree of support for the conclusion
7. Can well develop and defend a reasonable position regarding a belief or an action, doing justice to challenges

8. Formulates plausible hypotheses
9. Plans and conducts experiments well
10. Defines terms in a way appropriate for the context
11. Draws conclusions when warranted – but with caution
12. Integrates all of the above aspects of critical thinking

Although the word 'critical' is sometimes used in a negative sense, this conception of critical thinking is not negative. Also, it does not treat critical thought as persuasion, but critical thought will, we hope, often be persuasive. The future of democracy depends on it.

Critical Reading Strategies: In order to be a successful critical thinker, one must become a better critical reader. Here are some suggestions that will improve your critical or active reading skills (these techniques can also be applied to visual or auditory texts):

- 1.) **Before reading a text, do some preliminary work.** Look at the title, author, date of publication, and where the text was published (web site, book, magazine, etc). See what you can infer (to make an assumption based on previous knowledge) about the text before even reading it. It may also be helpful to skim the introduction and conclusion, so you can get the gist of the article.
- 2.) **Next, read the text once and then start over.** Since most of the readings are not too long, you should read them at least twice. This ensures that you will better understand the content, which in turn will help you write a stronger Critical Reading Response. During the second read, engage with the text; in other words, rather than simply reading the words on paper, use a pen, a pencil, and/or a highlighter to keep track of what you're reading. Write comments in the margins (annotate), underline key points or words you don't understand, highlight passages that are illuminating or confusing (but if you highlight, make sure to write a comment next to it, so you remember its significance). All of these things will help to formulate and organize your ideas when writing your CRRs.
- 3.) **Understand the differences between analysis and summary.** When you summarize a text, you state the work's main ideas and key points simply, briefly, and accurately. In college writing, you will most often be asked to analyze a text since this demonstrates critical thinking. Diana Hacker says, "Whereas a summary most often answers the question of what a text says, an analysis looks at how a text makes its point. A good analytical response depends on:
 - The thoroughness with which you have read the text
 - The depth of engagement you exhibit in your writing

A Final Thought: Like many new things you do in life, you might be a little confused at first on how to write these CRRs. Therefore, just relax, knowing that you have probably done something similar to this before, and even if it's completely new, just follow the guidelines here and you should be fine. The more you engage with the texts in this class, the better you will do on the essays, presentations, discussions, and other aspects—just remember that everything is linked and meant to work together to help you become a better critical thinker and writer.