

Developing your critical analysis skills

Most of the assignments in this course require you to "think critically" about the assigned topic. This means that assignments based on readings require you to do more than simply summarize or describe the reading. Critical thinking about the course material actually involves two steps:

1. Reading for understanding, and
2. Analyzing what you have read

Reading for understanding:

This is the first part of the critical analysis process, and there are five steps to follow.

1. Identify the thesis statement and the topic sentences.
2. Identify key words and phrases.
3. Learn any new-to-you vocabulary.
4. Examine the order in which points are presented.
5. Identify how the writer supports the thesis, by way of examples, illustrations, arguments, and so on.

Analyzing what you have read

In general, it's nearly impossible to critically analyze everything about a piece of writing. Focusing on a single aspect of the work is usually the most time-effective and practical way to proceed. For instance, you could analyze one of the following:

- x Thesis statement: Is it clearly stated? Logical? Convincing? Do you agree or disagree with it? Why?
- x Supporting details: Do they support the thesis in a logical and convincing way? Are there enough details (relevant evidence, experience, and/or information) to support the thesis completely? If there aren't, what needs to be added?
- x Organization: How is the article organized or structured? Do the writing have a logical flow to it? Does the writer make good use of transition devices?
- x The issue: Is it examined thoroughly? Has anything been overlooked? If so, why might this be the case?

How to develop your group and individual assignments using critical analysis skills:

- x Identify the author's standpoint and assumptions. By standpoint we are referring to the lens through which the author views the topic about which they are writing. This may include social locations, insider/outsider status (epistemic privilege) in relation to the topic, etc. All you can do is to surmise as much about the author as possible from the

information given -- it is not always explicit.