

HOW TO BECOME A CRITICAL READER

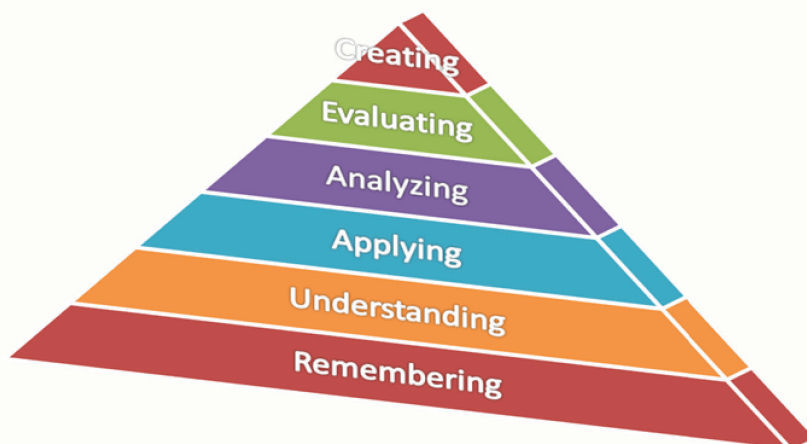
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Tertiary education requires a great deal of time and effort to be spent on reading. As such, academic reading should not be viewed as a passive activity but an active process which contributes to the goals of learning. To become a critical reader requires one to possess good reading skills and have conscious effort on the part of the learner to understand the reading text, make links, understand and evaluate opinions and research as well as give opinions

However, in this digital era, teaching critical reading to ESL students can be a great challenge. Students today prefer to read materials online and would rather scroll down their apps such as handphone, laptops or tablets than holding a hardcopy of a book. Statistics on Malaysian reading habit reveal that 80 % of Malaysians are “reluctant” readers. As such, as educators it is important for us to encourage and develop good reading skills in our students so that they become critical thinkers. The question is how can we do this? What is critical reading?



Reading critically does not necessarily mean one has to be critical of what he/she reads. It does not mean being 'critical' about some idea, argument, or piece of writing and claiming that it is somehow faulty or flawed. Critical reading means being engaged to the text or material being read by asking questions such 'what is the author trying to say?' or 'what is the main argument being presented?'. You need to evaluate and analyse what you have read as different authors have different points of views to ideas or arguments that is presented in a text. In an academic sense, critical reading means taking your understanding of the text a step further by advancing your understanding of it and not dismissing it just because you do not agree with the author. It also means exercising your judgement about what you are reading and not taking anything read at face value. In critical reading, the reader questions, analyses and evaluates the text and uses critical-thinking skills to differentiate between facts and opinions, recognise authors's purpose in writing, make inferences, recognise the author's tone in writing as well as persuasive techniques used to capture attention in accepting the author's point of view. Critical readers are not simply absorbing the information; instead, he/she is interpreting, categorizing, questioning, and weighing the value of that information. In other words, the reader is engaging in higher-order thinking and the upper reaches of Bloom's taxonomy as described in the diagram below:



Here are some ways in how we could encourage our students to become critical readers when engaging in a text.

1. Previewing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skim and the title and illustrations. What does it tell you? • Previewing enables readers to get a sense of what the text is about and how it is organized before reading it closely.
2. Contextualizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place the text in its historical, biographical or cultural contexts to examine its significance • Recognize the differences between your values and beliefs and the those represented in the text
3. Questioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions about the content to understand the text better • Ask what is the purpose of the author in writing the text, what ideas/arguments does the author express, how are these ideas justified? How does the author justify the arguments? Is it valid? • Examine the tone and language used in the text
4. Reflecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the challenges to your values and beliefs • Examine your personal response to the arguments/ideas in the text • Do you agree/diasagree with the author? Why? Why not?
5. Outlining and Summarising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and jot down the main ideas and supporting details • Synthesise the content you have read • Summarise whatyou have read (in your own words)
6. Evaluating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test the logic of the text as well as its creadibilityand emotional impact. • Evaluate every claim (idea, opinion, judgement.point of view) n support)t made in the arguments. • Evaluate the support(reasons, assumptions, values, evidence such as facts, examples, statics, authorities) given to justify the claim
7. Comparing and Constrasting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore likeness and differences of the arguments/issue discussed between texts for better understanding as authors may approach an issue in different ways

To conclude, reading helps to strengthen literacy proficiency and language learning. So, make reading a pleasure activity and be an active reader, even if its for leisure or “guilty pleasure”. Be a critical reader and you will definitely reap the benefits!