Graduate Prep Course

MODULE 2: Critical Reading
Critical Reading

Learning Objectives:

- Review the definition of critical reading
- Determine a personal process for critical reading and evaluation of written materials
- List questions that might be asked in effective critical evaluation of the literature
- Recognize the elements of an appropriate and effective literature review
Critical Reading

During the course of graduate study, students will read extensively, including evidence based literature, narratives, case studies, journals, and other sources of information.
Critical Reading

- Graduate classes involve active participation, therefore, readings are required to be completed before the class sessions.
- For many students, the volume of required readings will be challenging.

Critical reading skills help students to read effectively.
Critical Reading

- The relationships of concepts and ideas lead to the generation of new ideas.
- Developing critical reading skills assists students to carefully reflect on the material they read, analyze it through discussions and critiques, and further develop the topics in their own written work.
- Developing an approach that works for you is important to allow you to assimilate the knowledge and manage your time effectively.
Critical Reading

- Critical reading is defined as:

  Reading, reflecting upon, and evaluating the information presented

  Interpreting and analyzing the key concepts embedded in the literature

  Understanding and critiquing the evidence presented by the author(s)

  Determining the logic and identifying strengths and weaknesses

  Making a judgment about the author’s arguments and conclusions
Critical Reading

- STEPS in the process of critical reading:

  Review the objectives for the assignment – faculty will highlight the key content areas with focused objectives

Scan the reading assignment:

  Review the table of contents, introduction or abstract, and conclusion

  Read the titles and subheadings to learn how the author(s) organized the material

  Note information pulled out of the text into boxes and tables
Critical Reading

- STEPS in the process of critical reading (Continued):

  When starting a new text, read the preface for insight into the purpose of the publication and the intended audience.

  Choose your **focus** for study based on the objectives for the assignment and your learning needs.
One traditional approach for study is **PQ4R**: (Slavin, 2006)

- **P**review – Scan readings to identify the general outline, main ideas, and subheadings.
- **Q**uestion – Think about the material and the questions you have as you read it, based on the introduction and headings. Your questions will direct your reading efforts.
- **R**ead - Read the material and attempt to answer your own questions.
- **R**eflect – Reflect on the readings and relate the ideas to your own knowledge and experience, while applying it to potential and real situations.
- **R**ecite - Use key points, headings, and your notes to remember the main content, reviewing it aloud to assimilate the knowledge or writing it to reflect on the main thesis of the work.
- **R**eview – Ask and answer questions about the readings, rereading the material as necessary if you are unsure of your level of comprehension.

Critical Reading

- What are some questions that will allow you to critically question and evaluate the reading material?

- What was your first thought when you read the introduction? What does the information mean? What are your questions?
- Differentiate between conceptual and empirical information.
- Are the concepts defined and explained?
- With the purpose of the text or paper in mind, evaluate how the author(s) develops and supports the topic.
- If you are reading evidence based literature, critique the evidence. Is it from a primary or secondary source? Is it well supported? Is the work original and compelling? Are there gaps in the data?
Critical Reading

What method (such as quantitative or qualitative research data, history, experience, theories, comparison and contrast) did the author(s) use to construct the argument?

Argument in this use is defined as related statements or propositions, which provide support, justification or evidence for the validity of another statement.

Choose the most important topic and critique the construction of the argument for it.

Is the author(s) reasoning and rationale explicit? If not, how can you further explore?

What other publications does the material compete with? Why and how are the author(s) views different?

How does the information affect your worldview, emotions, and perceptions?
Tips for comprehending and remembering:
You are reading to understand the author(s) reasoning or thinking, not just to memorize facts.
Note the text which reflects the validity of the evidence, the context, perspective, or the process by which the writer arrives at a conclusion.
Note any text which is unclear to you.
Read through the section before highlighting or writing notes, so that you gain an appreciation for the progression of the thought.
Critical Reading

Tips for comprehending and remembering (continued):

Highlighting is permanent and may cause you to skip over important ideas - that were missed the first time - when rereading. Using a pencil or sticky notes allows you to change your notation to a different part of the text that might better exemplify the thought behind the content. Critically listen to the discussions of your faculty and classmates for additional clues to understanding the reasoning.
Selecting the most current information on a topic will provide background, context and facilitate understanding of the topic by the writer and the reader.

The literature review is also the opportunity to review the current research evidence related to your topic.

The literature review includes all written sources necessary to write a paper or conduct a study.

Current literature consists of literature written within the past 5 years.

- Research that is considered “classic” in the field may also be used in the review and should be cited as the primary source. For example, cite Freud’s original publication versus another’s discussion of his work.
Steps to include in a literature review:

- Refine your topic – the topic may need to be narrowed or broadened according to the amount of literature available on the topic.
- Develop a search strategy and consider appropriate sources to include in the review. For example, while Wikipedia is extensive and easy to access, content on the site can be posted by anyone and is therefore not an appropriate source for academic work.
- Read the literature while making thorough notes *in your own words*.
- Evaluate and interpret the literature- develop a table which includes the citation information, conclusions, and your interpretation.
- Synthesize the information or group the literature according to how it is both similar and different. Think about why studies may differ and provide explanations for the differences.
- Ask another student to read the first draft and provide feedback.
Literature Review

- Determining sources to include requires distinguishing between primary sources and secondary sources.
  - *Primary sources* are those written by the original researcher.
  - *Secondary sources* consist of summaries or descriptions of a study by another individual.

- Primary sources are always preferred, if available, so that you can develop your own interpretation of the study or writing. This is especially significant with classic works.
Select the most appropriate databases for your topic. Examples:

- *Eric* for education resources
- *PsycINFO* for literature from psychology
- *CINAHL Plus* with full text for nursing and allied health literature
- *Medline* for life and health related sciences
- *Cochrane Collection Plus* is a source of high quality health care data, combining NHS Economic Evaluation Database (NHS EED) and Health Technology Assessments (HTA) with Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR), Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects (DARE), Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials and Cochrane Methodology Register.
- *DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS ONLINE* for copies of thesis and dissertations
Many other databases are available for a variety of specialty searches.

Ask for guidance from:

- **Grace Library** - Use the “Ask a Librarian” service at: [http://library.carlow.edu/eref.html](http://library.carlow.edu/eref.html)

- or

- **Regional Learning Alliance - Writing and Research Center**