



# LEAP Online

Learning Excellence Achievement Pathway Online Tutorial



## Critical Reading

LEAP Online

## Contents

Introduction .....	1
How to Analyse Source Information .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
How to Approach Your Decision .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Analytical questions .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Activity: Source Breakdown.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Appraisal questions .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Activity: Author Appraisal .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Evaluative questions.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Activity: Compare and Contrast.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Other Forms of Questioning .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Objectivity .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Timing.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Supporting evidence .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Relevance.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Pro's and Con's.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Use your judgement.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Critical Appraisal Tools.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Systematic reviews .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Observational studies .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Case study.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Qualitative review .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Economic evaluation.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Establishing study type .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Summary.....	6

### Introduction

The ability to read critically is a fundamental skill in higher education, essential for academic success and professional growth. It goes beyond simply trying to understand the text; it involves actively engaging with the material, questioning assumptions, evaluating arguments and externalising the meaning. Here's why it's important:

#### Developing analytical skills

Critical reading enhances analytical thinking by encouraging students to examine texts from multiple perspectives, identify biases, and discover underlying meanings.

#### Building knowledge

It deepens understanding by challenging students to evaluate the validity and reliability of information, leading to a more nuanced grasp of complex subjects.

#### Fostering independence

It cultivates independence in learning, empowering students to form their own opinions based on evidence rather than passively accepting information presented to them.

## Reading Critically



Let's look at the different steps you can take to help you read critically.

### Step 1 – Find your purpose

- When you begin to read source material, you should ask yourself questions, such as:
- Why am I reading this source? For example, are you reading to help with your upcoming assignment or just to gather ideas?
- What is the purpose of reading this source? Are you looking for background/contextual information? Are you looking for specific data/statistics or facts on the topic or the author's opinion?
- What is my existing knowledge? Use your lecture notes or your existing knowledge on the topic.
- How will I recognise when I have got the information I need?

### Step 2 – Understand the text

Start by gaining a clear understanding of the main ideas and arguments presented in the source. Pay attention to the structure, key concepts and supporting evidence.

Finding information in academic source material, such as Journal Articles, can be tricky. They will usually have some or all of the following sections:

- Introduction
- Aims
- Literature review

## Critical Reading

- Methodology
- Findings/results
- Discussion
- Conclusion
- Recommendations

The list below will help you to find key information in Journal Articles:

- What are the key concepts/words/terms in this article? Look in the introduction. Find the definitions. Highlight key words and make sure you understand them. Look up new words if you are not sure what they mean.
- What did the researchers want to find out? You will find this in the introduction and/or aims section. Sometimes research questions are stated again at the beginning of the methodology section.
- How did the researchers get their data (e.g., interviews, experiments, questionnaires, medical trials)? You will find this in the first paragraph of the methodology section and the abstract.
- What did the researchers find out? Look in the discussion section for a summary of what they learnt.
- What are the implications? What needs to happen? What are the recommendations? Why is this research useful/important? How will it impact professionals, patients, the public, etc.? Look in the conclusions/recommendations sections.

### Step 3 – Reading strategies

Reading academic text is hard! It might not get easier, but with practice, you will get better at it. It is important to recognise that you cannot read academic text in the same way as other text. For instance, you should not:

- Read the text on a tiny phone screen
- Not while you're doing other things
- Not quickly and not just once

To help you read text, consider using one of the reading strategies, which can be found under 'Step 3' of Planning Your Assignment:

- [Planning Your Assignment](#) - LEAP Online

#### Step 4 – Evaluate the author’s argument

Assess the strength of the author’s argument by examining the evidence provided and identifying any logical fallacies or weaknesses in reasoning.

#### Step 5 - Identify bias

Be mindful of potential biases in the text. Consider the author's background and perspective, as well as any implicit assumptions they may have made. Check on the '[Cognitive Bias](#)' tutorial of this section for more information.

#### Step 6 – Ask questions

Develop a habit of asking questions as you read. The author’s stance should be clearly outlined and supported by credible evidence. Therefore, consider asking the following questions to evaluate their position:

- What is the paragraph you’re reading about?
- Where is the author coming from?
- Is the author's argument clear? How is it presented?
- What evidence has the author provided? Is it valid?
- Is the author’s argument convincing?
- Do you agree with their argument? Why?
- Do you disagree with their argument? Why?
- Are there any alternative viewpoints? Have these been overlooked by the author?
- How could you use this in your assignment?

Asking questions like these means that you are actively engaging analytically with the information (Burns and Sinfield, 2022). To enhance your questioning skills, check out the '[How to Ask Better Questions for Critical Thinking](#)' tutorial within this section.

### Step 7 – Externalise meaning

Connect the ideas presented in the source to broader contexts, such as current events, other readings, or personal experiences. Discussing the source with peers or tutors can deepen your understanding and provide different perspectives.

### Step 8 – Take notes

Capture your thoughts, questions, and key points as you read. This helps organise your thoughts and prepares you for further analysis or discussions.

Taking effective notes while reading will help you to clarify your thoughts, organise your ideas and engage critically with the material.

Using Microsoft OneNote can help to streamline your note-taking process. You can import screenshots or scan journal articles and books, etc. and annotate them with your insights. The highlighter tool within OneNote proves particularly beneficial for pinpointing strengths and weaknesses in arguments. This tool is accessible as part of your Office 365 package.

For further support on using Office 365, visit [IT Services](#).

For further support on note making, visit: [LEAP Online - Note Making](#).

For guidance on specialised software and tools tailored to support your studies and assessments (e.g., dictation and screen reading software) visit the Disability Team at [Services for Disabled Students - Support](#).

### Step 9 – Seek additional support

Don't hesitate to explore additional sources to supplement your understanding of the topic. Consult academic articles, books, or expert opinions to gain a more comprehensive perspective.

## Summary

By implementing these strategies, you can develop your critical reading skills and become a more discerning and analytical reader. This will not only benefit you academically but also in your ability to navigate and interpret information in various contexts.

## References

Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2022) *Essential Study Skills: The Complete Guide to Success at University*. 5th ed. London: SAGE.