Questions to support critical reading

The following list of questions is designed to help you develop a critical approach when reading academic texts.

1. **In what way is the text relevant to your aims?** Do you need to read this text for an assignment, to prepare for a seminar, or to give you an overview of a topic? Asking yourself this question will help you to make the right decisions about how to approach the text.

2. **What is the purpose of the text?** Is the author presenting research or a theory? Are they trying to persuade? Is this a response to another text? Does it build on previous work? Is it an overview of a topic? Is it designed for academics, practitioners, students, researchers, or the general public?

3. **Who is the author?** Is this person a key name in the field? Have they been mentioned by your lecturers? Have they been cited by other key authors? Are they from a particular university or organisation? Why is this information about the author relevant?

4. **When was the text written?** Is it up-to-date enough for the subject you are studying? If it is a key text from the past how is it likely to have been influenced by the time when it was written? How have subsequent writers built on this?

5. **What kind of text is it?** Is it a core text from your course? Is it an article from a peer-reviewed journal? What is the relevance of the title of the journal? Is the text from a government website? How can you find out more about the reputation of the source you are using?

6. **What is the key argument?** What is the main point the author is trying to make? What is your response to this? Do you agree or disagree with the author? Can you pinpoint why or why not?

7. **How does the author structure, develop and support their argument?** Do they use evidence based on research or theory? Do they use logical reasoning? Do they use persuasive argument? What sources does the author use to support their argument?

8. **Is the evidence sound?** Is it up-to-date and reliable? Are there any limitations to any research evidence used? Is every step of the reasoning logical and coherent?

9. **How does this argument compare with other texts you have read on this subject?** Does it agree or disagree? Does it perhaps build on the argument of another writer and develop it further? Or does it come from a completely different perspective? If so how does it differ? Why is it different? Is it convincing?
10. **What are the implications of the text?** What are the consequences of what has been argued? How does this link to the wider debate? What is the logical next step in terms of further research or debate?

11. **Is there any information the author has omitted to include?** Has the author taken other perspectives into account? Have they deliberately omitted anything?

12. **Can you identify any assumptions that the author makes?** Is there anything that the author is taking for granted? You often have to ‘read between the lines’ to spot these assumptions, because they will not be stated explicitly.

13. **Is there anything else that you need to take into account?** This might include the political, educational and cultural context in which the text was written or the possibility of a hidden agenda or bias.

14. **Where do you need to go next?** Does the text guide you to further reading? Are there key terms that you need to check by reading more widely on the topic? Does the text open up a new area that is relevant to your purposes?

14. **What kind of language is used in the text?** Is it accessible, straightforward language or is it highly complex? Is it persuasive, objective, passionate, or measured? What can this tell you about the writer and the writer’s purpose? Also what can it tell you about the suitability of the text for your own purpose?

15. **If the text is presenting research, where did the research funding come from?** Why might this be relevant?

16. **Where do the ideas come from?** Are they based on established theory? Are they building on theories of others, or refuting them? Do you need to do some further reading to find out more about what the ideas are based on?

17. **Does the view expressed coincide with my view?** If not, be open to having your view challenged and use the text to clarify your view. If yes, be careful not to be complacent – challenge your view anyway.