

*"Reading furnishes the mind only with the materials of knowledge; it is thinking that makes what we read ours."*

John Locke (1632-1704), English philosopher

Thinking while reading, or critical reading, begins with one simple thing: curiosity. Reading critically or approaching to a text with a critical eye does not mean reading to "find fault". It is the ability to judge the quality/assumptions/prepositions and/or meaning of a piece of writing.

Basically, critical reading is a way of looking at a written material to analyse:

- what the author is saying and
- the methods the author is using to communicate his/her message.

Your analysis is complete when you have formed your own interpretations of the author's intentions.

#### **5 questions you can ask while reading:**

- What is the author's main thesis? What are its origins?
- How easy is it to determine the author's main thesis? Is it stated up front or does it develop as you read?
- What evidence does the author introduce to support the main thesis? What is left out? Does the decision of what is included and what is omitted affect who benefits and who suffers in the analysis?
- If you found the author's analysis/argument convincing, at what point and in what way did it convince you? If not, at what point did it fail to convince you?
- What other reactions did you have to the reading?

All authors make assertions that they want you to accept as true. As a critical reader, you should not accept anything on face value but to recognize every assertion as an argument that must be carefully evaluated.

## Worksheet 4 - Reading Critically and Responding to Texts

An argument has two essential parts: a claim and support. The claim asserts a conclusion -- an idea, an opinion, a judgment, or a point of view -- that the author wants you to accept. The support includes reasons (shared beliefs, assumptions, and values) and evidence (facts, examples, statistics, and authorities) that give readers the basis for accepting the conclusion. When you assess an argument, you are concerned with the process of reasoning as well as its truthfulness (these are not the same thing). At the most basic level, in order for an argument to be acceptable, the support must be appropriate to the claim and the statements must be consistent with one another.

### Identifying an argument

**Examine the short texts below and identify the claims and supports the authors use. Then, write about how the claim makes you feel. Are you convinced or not? Support your answer as strongly as possible. Your aim should be to make your reaction clear and plausible.**

**Example:** Three years ago, I gave up eating anything with wheat in it. In that time, I managed to lower my cholesterol levels by 100 points and lost nearly 85 pounds. I now feel better than I did in years. I have decided to write a book to share my experience and to inspire people who want to lead a healthy life. The first thing I recommend them to do is to stop eating wheat products. I have discovered that people are not made to eat wheat and giving it up is the key to being healthier.

**Claim:** People should not consume wheat.

**Support:** The author has had many health benefits since s/he stopped eating wheat.

**Your reaction:** The author is probably not aware what consequences his/her suggestions may have as /she believes s/he is doing a responsible thing. However, what works for him/her may not work for someone else. So, one cannot make generalizations and recommend people what/what not to do on basis of their individual experience. Health issues are so complex that only experts and doctors can make suggestions for one's health.

**Practice**

1. An advertisement for E-News, a subscription-only online newspaper with no ads accompanying its content, put forward that individuals should subscribe to E-News so as to eliminate wasted time that results from seeing and ignoring advertisements while attempting to read newspapers that feature ads.

**Claim:**

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**Support:**

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**Your reaction:**

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2. Automation, the trademark of modern economy, is essential to maximizing a country's economic production while minimizing its costs. Healthcare executives also utilize automation as they want to increase revenues while reducing costs. Consequently, they propose significantly greater automation of healthcare. Yet, this should be rejected. Radical automation of health care would cause patients to lose trust in the system as the health care they would receive would lack the in-person care that patients would rather desire.

**Claim:**

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**Support:**

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**Your reaction:**

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## Worksheet 4 - Reading Critically and Responding to Texts

3. Early data on seat-belt use showed that seat-belt wearers were less likely to be killed in road accidents. Hence, it was initially believed that wearing a seat-belt increased survival chances in an accident. But what the early analysts had failed to see was that cautious drivers were more likely to wear the belts and were also less likely to cause big accidents, while reckless drivers were more likely to be involved in big accidents and were less likely to wear the belts.

**Claim:**

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**Support:**

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**Your reaction:**

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4. I believe photography can no longer be considered an art form. Nowadays everyone has access to digital cameras that only need to be pointed at the subject to generate a perfect image. One click and *viola*; you have captured a fantastic image. You may also use some programs to make your image flawless.

**Claim:**

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**Support:**

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**Your reaction:**

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5. A marriage counselor noted that couples who have occasional violent arguments are less likely to divorce within the next six months than those who have frequent but less violent arguments. He concluded that frequent arguing is a major factor in the causation of severe marital disharmony.

**Claim:**

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**Support:**

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**Your reaction:**

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**When you are reading longer texts, there will probably be more supports the author uses to make his/her claim plausible. Read the following text below and identify the claim and support(s). Indicate your personal reaction to the claim made.**

### **Do schools kill creativity?**

*Summary of the seminal TED talk by Sir Ken Robinson*

Ken thinks that creativity is as important in education as literacy. However, children are being taught how not to be wrong. Ken argues that being creative means that you have to be willing to be wrong, and the education system treats being wrong as the worst thing possible. In doing this, education teaches away children's natural urge to 'give it a go'.

He gives an example of a schoolgirl:

*"I heard a great story recently -- I love telling it -- of a little girl who was in a drawing lesson. She was six, and she was at the back, drawing, and the teacher said this girl hardly ever paid attention, and in this drawing lesson, she did. The teacher was fascinated. She went over to her, and she said, "What are you drawing?" And the girl said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." And the teacher said, "But nobody knows what God looks like." And the girl said, "They will in a minute."*

## Worksheet 4 - Reading Critically and Responding to Texts

All education systems globally have a 'hierarchy', with math and language at the top, social sciences in the middle and arts at the bottom. This is because the childhood education system was developed to satisfy the industrial revolution of the 19th century, where math and science were essential for jobs, but times have changed. While once people just needed school for a good job, then a bachelor degree, and now that alone is no guarantee for a job. Degrees have had a form of inflation over time, and this shows it is shifting too quickly. Having children go to school just to attend university is not really equipping them to work anymore.

We know three things about intelligence. Firstly, it is diverse – we think in many ways – visually, in sound, movement, abstract. Next, it is dynamic – original ideas come about from the interaction of many different ways of seeing things. It is also distinct – people have their way of doing things – Ken's example is a 'problem student' who couldn't sit still at school, but when moved to a dance school fit in fine – she needed to move to think. Her dance skills went on to give her immense fame and fortune, bringing value to millions of people. In modern times, she would probably have been given ADHD\* medication and been put told to calm down.

We need to redefine our education system – our current way is one of 'strip mining' our children for the most desired properties, in the same way we mined the Earth for ore. We now need to use our imagination and creativity wisely, to face an uncertain and problematic future. We may not see this future, but need to equip our children to conquer it.

\*ADHD: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

What claim does Sir Ken Robinson make?

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How does he support his claim?

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## Worksheet 4 - Reading Critically and Responding to Texts

What is your reaction to his claim? Agree? Disagree? Why?

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