



Critical reading moves a step beyond simple comprehension: the reader must understand and evaluate the author's main point, issues raised, and conclusions.

## 1. Identify the issue.

- Descriptive: asks who, what, how, does, how much, can...? (Example, "Who was responsible for the decision that lead the United States to declare war?")
- Prescriptive: Raises questions about what should be done or what is right, good, or bad. (Example: "The United States should not have declared war because....")

## 2. Identify the conclusion.

- Example: "The US should not have declared war because of a, b and c."
- A conclusion must be supported by evidence, or it is simply an opinion.

## 3. Identify Assumptions.

- Ideas taken for granted, often unstated or hidden, that are influential in determining the conclusion and necessary for the reasoning to make sense.
- Value assumptions: an implicit preference for one value over another in a particular context. Assumptions about the way the world should be. (The government is responsible for the common good and education benefits everyone, therefore "The government should provide more money for schools.")
- Descriptive assumptions: those things that the writer takes for granted as fact, beliefs about the way the world is.

## 4. Look for Evidence

- What supports your assumptions, facts, claims, etc.? What is the proof? How do you know it is true? Why do you believe that? Can you prove that? Are you sure that it is true?
  - Intuition
  - Authorities or testimonials
  - Personal experience
  - Personal observation
  - Case studies or examples
  - Research studies
  - Analogies.

## 5. Look for reasoning errors.

- Attacks on a person or person's background, not ideas.
- Presentation of a faulty dilemma.
- Oversimplification
- Diverting attention from the issue.
- Confusion of "what is.." with "what should be..."
- Allows only perfect solutions (and therefore dismisses reasonable arguments or ideas.)