

READING SKILLS: ACADEMIC JOURNALS AND SCHOLARLY ARTICLES

Critical Reading

MUNI Language
Centre
CJV

English Skills for Academic Staff in Higher Education Summer School
Masaryk University Language Centre
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Academic Reading Strategies

Surveying

Text genre recognition

Skimming

Scanning

Guessing unknown words

Reading for detail

Annotating text

Main idea/subsidiary ideas

Credible/Limitations/evidence

Authors stance

Readers Stance

Summarising

Surveying

- Looking over the text to see how it is divided into sections, abstract, introduction, graphs, data, conclusion, reference lists, further reading.
- This is not only helpful for reading but also might give you an insight on how to structure your thesis/research paper.

Text Genre Recognition

- What type of text is it? Case study, SWOT analysis, report, argument, overview of recent and past findings?
- More importantly: What type of text do you need for your research? Are you looking for methodological explanations, theory-based reading, empirical study?

Skimming

Read a text / section quickly to gain the basic idea: this can be done in a number of ways.

- Reading the first two sentences and last sentence of each paragraph
- Reading 2-3 words of each line down the middle of a paragraph
- Reading each topic sentence of each section
- Reading the introduction and conclusion
- Reading the abstract
- A combination of all the above

Now, swap your reading paper with your peer, and skim through the text for a minute or two.

Scanning

- This is looking over a text for key terms / data or dates. Skimming through a text quickly just looking for the important key information.
- To **scan** means to look just for specific information. When you look for a definition in a dictionary, you are scanning. You are looking for only one entry. You find it as quickly as you can, and you read only that information.

Guessing Unknown Words

- Some words can be easily guessed from context and this means you don't have to keep checking your dictionary.
- For example, 'a university degree offers a **decorous** job and entry to a middle-class lifestyle'.
- 'Decorous' is an unknown word BUT from context you can guess it means 'respectable, refined, formal, higher quality'.

Reading for Detail

- This is in-depth reading - understanding exactly what the section / text is saying. Taking your time to read, checking meaning and difficult vocabulary.

Annotating text

- Your process of making notes around a text. Some students use highlighters to mark key points, others write notes in the margins.

Main idea / subsidiary ideas

- Quite often the main idea is expressed in the topic sentence / first sentence of a paragraph (but not always). Then usually this will be followed by support (subsidiary ideas) and examples. Learning how to identify main points and support is a key skill for summary writing.

Credible / Limitations / evidence

- Your process of making notes around a text. Some students use highlighters to mark key points, others write notes in the margins.

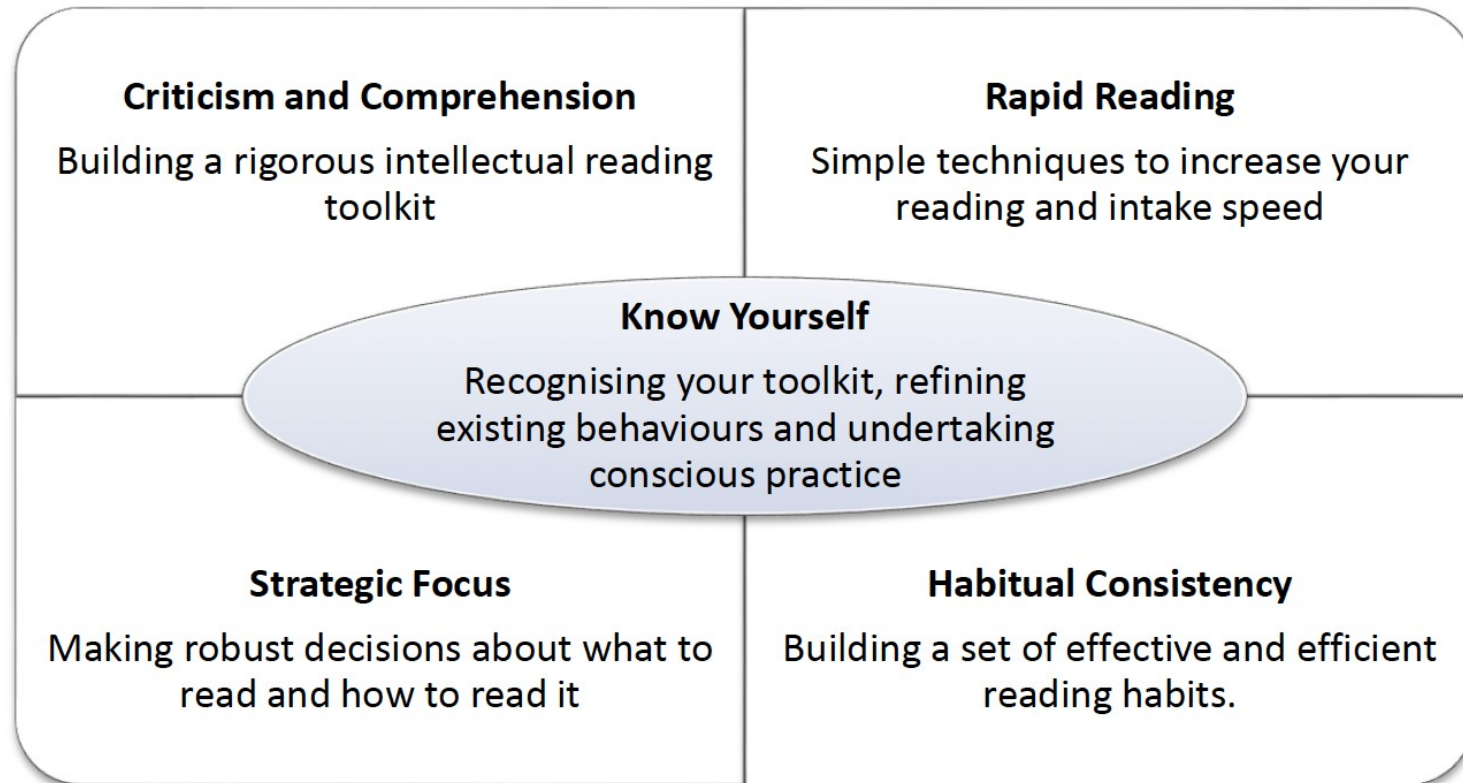
Authors Stance

- What side is the author arguing? Are they for or against? How do you know? Where are examples in the text that highlight this?

Readers Stance

- Are you convinced by what you have read? Do you agree with the writer's ideas and evidence presented? Is there anything in your experience that you question about the text?

How to become a better reader?



Knowing Yourself

- What reading habits do you have that particularly help your effectiveness?
- What habits do you have that limit your effectiveness?

Building the Right Environment

What physical conditions do you need to concentrate most effectively?

What is your best time(s) of day to focus? Do you protect this time?

Do you effectively remove distractions?

For how long can you effectively focus without taking a break? (NB – sitting at your desk, with a paper open and checking social media is not focusing...)

1. Knowing Yourself

- **Information Seeking and Capture**

- Do you have a cogent literature searching strategy?
- Are your searching tools up to date and suitably refined? (Are you up-to-date with AI?)
- How do you decide ultimately what to read? (and NOT to read?)
- Are your personal cataloguing systems and reading databases up to date and comprehensive?

- **Note Taking and Processing**

- Do you have a consistent note-taking method? Is it effective?
- Do you find yourself re-reading papers, because your own notes were poor?
- At note-taking stage, can you separate out your 'factual' notes (i.e. what the author says) from your 'critical' ones (i.e. what you think of their work)?
- Does your strategy change according to the relative (to your 'thesis') value of the article?

Knowing Yourself

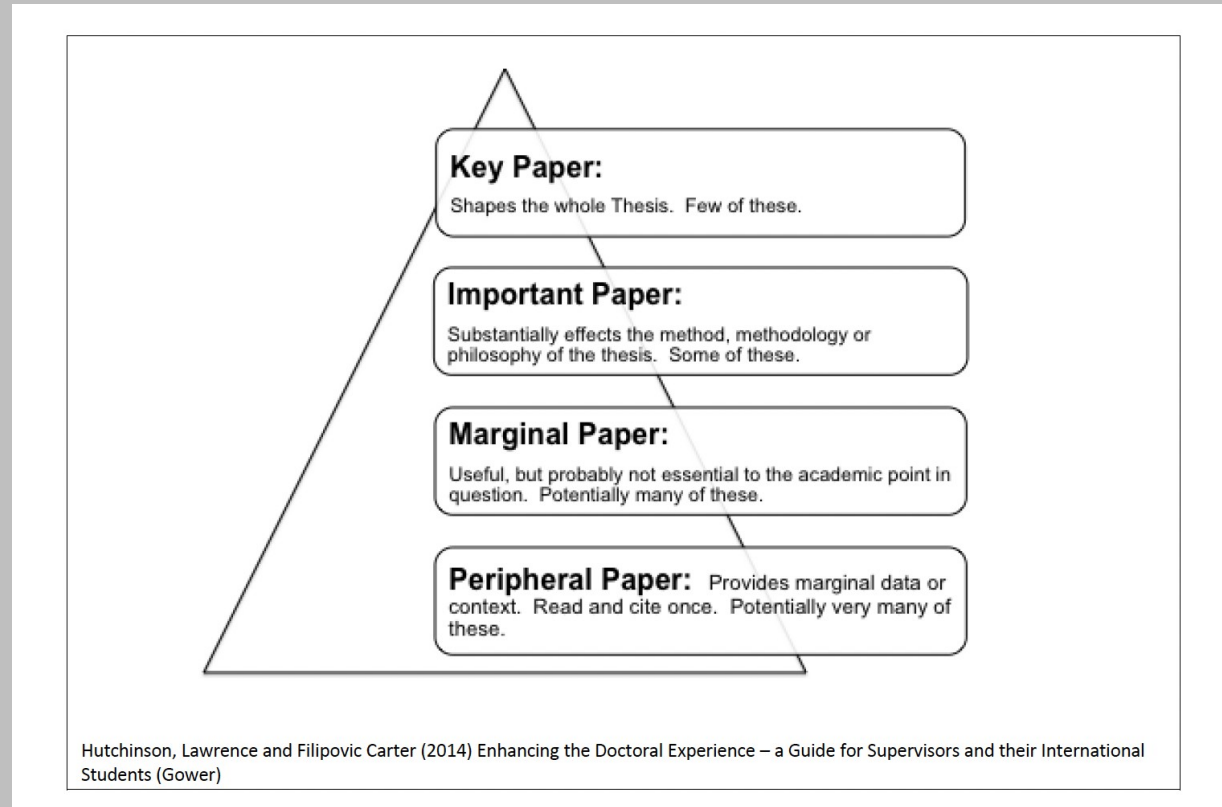
TIP! To be an effective reader, always remember 'TYPE O'

TURN YOUR PHONE and EMAIL OFF!

2. Strategic Focus

S	Source. Who is the author? What do you already know about their style/focus etc.?
T	Title. What signpost information has the author chosen to help guide the reader?
A	Abstract. The paper in miniature. There is much helpful signposting information in this text and the abstract will help you decide which elements of the paper you will focus on
G	Graphics. Are there any? If so, which ones have been presented and what information can you glean from them?
E	Express Read (Skimming). Ask yourself whether this paper requires a full in-depth analysis or simply a quick pass-over to check for one small fact?

2. Strategic Focus



3. Habitual Consistency

There is no 'right way' to take notes from an article or chapter. You should find and refine a consistent system based on a number of questions. Such as:

- Is the article in question of substantive value to your thesis? If so, you should be processing and making notes with greater depth and thoroughness.
- Will you need to return the original article in the future because you can't understand or read your own notes? (Of course, you'll have to revisit some source materials – it's called RE-search for a reason – but this shouldn't be because your processing was sloppy).

3. Habitual Consistency

Is your note-taking consistent and streamlined? You may find it helpful to develop a coding system like;

Major Point	Solid Ring
Secondary Point	Solid Underline
Tertiary Point	Dotted Underline
Quotation	In brackets
Agree/Disagree	A/D
Exciting/Contentious	!/*
Unclear – don't understand	?
Follow this up	##

3. Habitual Consistency

You could also apply this notion to using different colours (either using a good PDF reader or a multi-coloured pen) to annotate different types of information.

Black

Relating to data

Red

Relating to your critical opinion of the work

Blue

Relating to the author's process of obtaining data

Green

Idea/insight

Reading Time

Before You Start to Read

- Why did you choose to read this article? What are you reading it FOR?
- What type of information do you seek?
- What questions are you looking for the answers to?

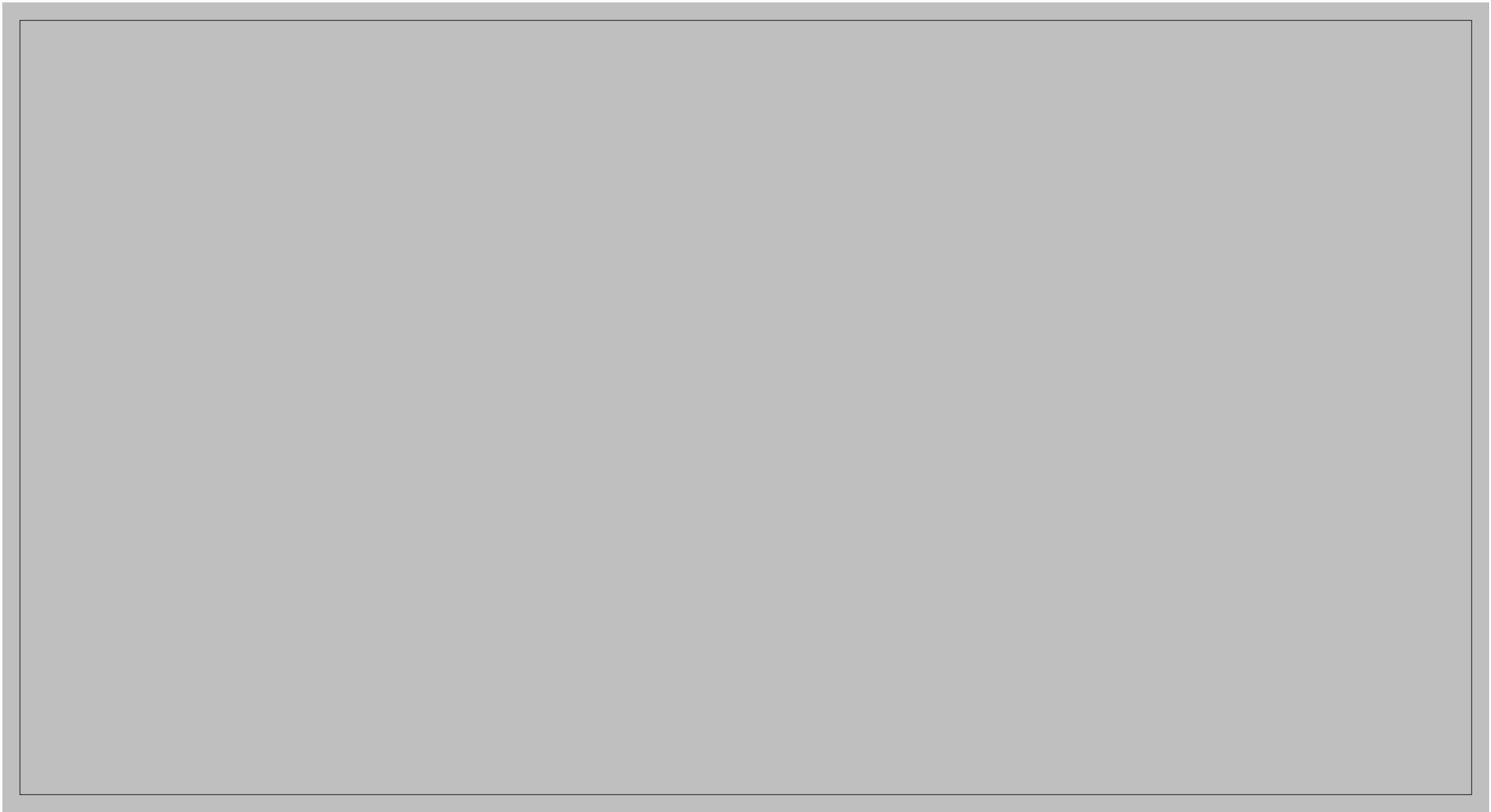
As You Start to Read

- How typically do you approach the reading process? (i.e. graphics first, or a quick skim through, or start with the abstract and conclusions etc).

Reading Time

And when you've finished the article...

- How useful is this material going to be to you?
- Ask yourself 'So what?' – (i.e. does this paper add value?)
- How pivotal will this be to your 'thesis'? Is it key (and so you will probably cite it on multiple occasions) or is it peripheral?



Critical reading Vs Active Reading

A “critical” reader needs to consider:

- What a text says
- How it says it
 - 1. Author(s)
 - 2. Assumptions and bias
 - 3. Evidence
- Who is saying it
- When it was said
- Where it was said (i.e. published)
- Why it was said

Author(s)

- Who is the author? Is the author an expert in this field?
- What is the source of the text? Is it trustworthy?
- When was it published? Is it recent?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What is the author's purpose? Is it a neutral purpose (e.g. *to explain* or *to inform*) rather than a more biased purpose (e.g. *to persuade*)?

Assumptions/bias

- What assumptions has the writer made? Are they clear to the reader? Are they valid?
- What is the author's stance (i.e. position) on the topic? Is this explicit?
- Does the writer present a balanced viewpoint? Are other viewpoints considered (e.g. via counter-arguments)?
- Does the writer represent the ideas of others accurately?
- Are the writer's conclusions reasonable in the light of the evidence presented?
- Is the writer's language neutral? Does the writer use tentative language (e.g. *It appears that... This may be caused by...*) and avoid the use of emphatic words/phrases (e.g. *It is obvious... Clearly... Of course...*)?
- Does the writer avoid using emotional language and dramatic images?
- Are the examples representative and free from bias?

Evidence

- How strong is the evidence?
- Are all the points made by the author supported by evidence?
- Does the writer avoid making unsupported generalisations?
- Is there a clear distinction between fact and the author's opinion?
- Are citations used? If so, are the cited sources trustworthy and recent?
- If there are any images or diagrams, are they clear? Do they relate directly to points in the text and support the author's argument?
- If it is a research article, is the methodology valid (e.g. sample size, method of sampling)? Are the limitations clear? Are the results consistent with the objectives?

Thank you! 😊

How to read critically?

Strategies for critical reading

- 1. Annotating
- 2. Contextualizing
- 3. Reflecting on challenges to your beliefs, values and habits
- 4. Paraphrasing
- 5. Outlining
- 6. Summarizing
- 7. Exploring the figurative language
- 8. Looking for patterns of opposition
- 9. Evaluating the logic of an argument
- 10. Recognizing emotional manipulation
- 11. Judging the writer's credibility
- 12. Analyzing the writing in other disciplines