

HOW TO SUMMARIZE AND INTERPRET

(adapted from Cottrell, 2011, pp. 152, 201-2013)

Accurate interpretation is particularly important to critical thinking. Researchers have found that people often get questions wrong because they do not adhere closely enough to what is asked or stated.

Incorrect interpretations can arise because reading is either over-focused on small details or it pays insufficient attention to details. Some common mistakes are:

- **Over-focused reading:** the reading is too slow, focusing excessively on individual words and sections of the text. Although close reading is a necessary part of critical reading, it is also important to interpret specific details in the wider context of the argument and the theoretical perspective.
- **Insufficient focus:** the reading is too superficial, taking in the big picture but lacking a sense of how the main theories and arguments are supported by specific details and evidence.
- **Insufficient attention to the exact wording:** missing out essential words such as 'not', or not following the exact sequence closely.
- **Failing to draw out correctly the implications of what is stated.**

It follows that, in order to interpret texts accurately, it helps to vary the focus of attention when reading, alternating between:

- **the big picture and the fine detail;**
- **a consideration of the exact words and unstated implications and assumptions.**

Task 1

Read the following texts and their interpretations. In each case, decide whether the interpretation:

A is an accurate interpretation of the writer's overall argument

B interprets the writer's position.

Give reasons for your response, identifying the overall argument.

Text 1:

Neighbours are generous with the cuttings they make from plants. Up and down the country, people are exchanging cuttings from their roses, fuschias and hostas. Many of the plants they share are registered for Plant Breeders' Rights. This entitles the person who bred or discovered the plant to a royalty. Gardeners never bother finding out which plants they must pay a royalty for. A cutting is the gardener's equivalent of burning a CD for music lovers. If gardeners don't bother paying royalties on cuttings, why should other people pay royalties, such as for music downloaded from the internet?

Ivan Potter, *In Your Gardening Questions*, a popular monthly magazine published by GPX Publishers in London, vol 6, June 2005.

Interpretation:

The author argues that as giving garden cuttings is regarded as acceptable and little concern is shown for royalty issues, then downloading music without paying should also be regarded as acceptable.

Text 2:

Piracy of software, videos, games and music is stealing, whether this is done by copying films onto video or sharing music files with other people on the internet. Some people argue that it is acceptable to make illegal copies as everybody else does it. Others rationalise this kind of theft on the grounds that publishers set unacceptably high prices. They forget that publishers are entitled to set prices at

whatever the market will take. Consumers have a choice. If they want the product enough, they should be prepared to pay for it. If not, they should go without.

P. D. Cuttle, legal expert, writing in article. 'Steal It Away'. In *National CRI Law Journal*, vol. 7, issue 4, during April 2007.

Interpretation:

Piracy is not usually acceptable and most customers should be prepared to go without an item if they are not willing to pay for it.

Text 3:

Many music distributors are not major business concerns. They employ only a few staff and are reliant on the overall sales of many small artists. This is especially the case for those who distribute independent artists, as sales of these are always low and many don't sell at all. As the market for such artists is low, even a few copies made by each purchaser would have a dramatic effect. Illegal copying is likely to contribute to the shaky financial base of the small distributors upon which independent music depends.

Galium Kahliney, 'Is this the End of the Road?' In *Small Music Distributor*, 12 August 2006. Article in trade magazine for small distributors.

Interpretation:

When people make free copies of music they put the future of distributors of independent artists at risk.

Text 4:

Lawyers argue that gardeners who give away cuttings of plants that are registered for Plant Breeders' Rights (or PBRs) are cheating the people who brought the plant into the market. Breeding a new variety of plant does not come cheaply. It can take many years to develop a new strain so that it is ready for marketing. For a plant to be accepted for PBRs, it must have proved that it is stable and uniform so that those who buy it know what it will look like several years down the line. The plant has to be distinct so that it can't lie confused with other plants. For every plant that succeeds, a breeder may have thousands of failures, each of which incurs a cost. Breeding can be costly, requiring investment in research, protected and controlled planting space, and specialised labour. If a breeder is lucky enough to be successful, they then have to pay a large sum to register the plant and there are further costs to renew the registration each year. After all that, the plant will last for only about 20 years, and the royalty runs out after 25 years. This means breeders need to maintain their investment in developing future strains or they will be deprived of an income. The royalty on a plant can be between 20 and 30 pence per cutting, or more. Multiply this by many thousands, and the breeders are really losing out. Whether or not they ever receive this money comes down to the average gardeners' ethical sensitivity and their awareness of PBRs. It is unlikely that the police will descend to recoup the royalties: lawyers focus on the big companies. However, as the lawyers point out, that doesn't mean free cuttings are acceptable: some breeders need every penny if they are to continue to produce new varieties for us to enjoy in the future.

Anjeli Johl, 'Counting the Cost of Flowers', in the *National Press Daily* newspaper, 10 July 2006. Johl is a regular columnist in the paper's reputable law section.

Interpretation:

This argues that Plants Breeders are only likely to take action against large companies, so the important issue for gardeners is that they are safe from prosecution.