

Overview of basic differences between critical reading and ordinary reading

NTK tutorial on How to read

	Ordinary reading	Critical reading
What am I reading it for?	I want to know WHAT is in the text.	I want to know IF and HOW the text fulfils its aim/realizes its intention.
How am I reading it?	I try to understand the content.	I try to analyze the content first, then to interpret and evaluate it.
Output during reading	Notes: quotes, paraphrases, and summaries used as memory aids.	Quotes, paraphrases, and summaries used methodically to support analysis, interpretation, and evaluation.
What am I focusing on?	What does it say in the text?	What does the text mean? What kind of text, what genre is involved? Who is it intended for and what is the author's goal?
Reading questions	What exactly am I interested in? What exactly am I looking for? What exactly does it say on a particular topic? What particular information or facts can I extract from the text?	What particular means are used to reach the stated goal? What are the typical patterns of thought or language? How does the text argue? What evidence is used? What are the assumptions made, what presuppositions relied on? What is the real intention and/or point of the text?
General tendency	Reading „with“ = the reader cooperates with the text. I assume the text is reliable and that it will tell me something useful, pleasant and/or necessary to know.	Reading „against the grain“ = a critical attitude. I assume the text is intended to influence or affect the reader in a particular way. I focus especially on: • Unspoken assumptions, • Rhetoric used, • Argumentation failures, logical fallacies, • Quality of presented evidence, • Coherence and reliability of conclusions.
Goal of reading	Repetition, re-telling, and summary of the content.	Methodical, exact, and comprehensive analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of the text or its aspect.
Form of the final outcome	Oral or written. Usually informal. In schools: notes used in preparing for an exam.	Oral or written. At university and in academia: formal presentation or lecture, credited assignments and essays, theses and dissertations, academic articles (a book review, a literature review, “state of the art” chapter of a thesis), monographs.
Wider context	Mostly an informal, peer-to-peer discussion with other readers – in book reading groups and tutorials – or in writing in school journals, on internet forums and similar.	Traditional forms of debate in which different views are opposed and compared. Informal: peer-to-peer debates. Formal: a conference paper, thesis/dissertation defense, peer review.