

# Critical reading with “Lamb to the Slaughter”

NLN 101 Language & Writing Skills-2 (Week 11)  
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## 1 Many ways to read

There is more than one way to read. How one reads usually depends on the purpose of reading. One could read for leisure, or for work. These two would demand different styles of reading.

### 1.1 Skim reading

The process of quickly reading through texts by zooming in only on signposts, markers of cohesion and topic statements of paragraphs (if they exist) is called **skim reading**. You have directly and indirectly engaged in this in the two Cohesion and Coherence classes.

This technique of reading gives the reader a **general overview** of the text. Skim reading is usually done when reading for work — academic purposes being one of them. As a reader, we need to assess if a text is worth engaging further with, considering what purpose made us choose the text in the first place.

Beware of skim reading texts you wish to read for leisure. Skim reading a piece of fiction, or “skim-watching” a movie might give away spoilers!

### 1.2 Critical reading

The next step, after skim reading a text is to read it critically, meaning as a reader you zoom further into the text and read it closely.

Remember that **critical reading is not reading to find fault**.

Critical reading means —

- to question the text
- to think about the author’s intentions and your interpretations as a reader
- evaluating the **claims** the author makes based on
  - evidence presented to support the claim
  - social implications of the claim

Since critical reading is all about asking questions, before asking questions, it is paramount that we judge if a piece of text is fiction or non-fiction. This is to ensure that questions suitable to the text-type are asked. Text-type is often revealed by the following:

1. The title of the text
2. The author
3. The place where the text is published
4. The content of the text

Once we have figured out what kind of text it is, we start the reading process.

## 2 Steps to do critical reading

1. First determine your text-type.
2. Then skim read it.
3. Now read the story from the start.
4. Next, consult the Question Bag below to guide you through the process of critically thinking about the text.

### 3 Critical reading “Question Bag”

#### 3.1 Questions on the structuring of ideas

1. What is the **theme** (central idea)?
2. What are the **motifs** (concrete language and abstractions — an object, image, sound, or phrase that is repeated throughout a story)?  
**You hook the theme through a peg of motifs, so identify motifs first.**
3. What is the **tone** of the story? How does the writer feel about the topic they are writing about (note how the writer writes i.e. the punctuation, sentence structure, devices, and especially word choices)?
4. What is the mood of the story? How to you feel reading it?
5. How is the title related to the text?

#### 3.2 Questions about characters

1. What are the characters like — are they flat? Are they rounded?  
**A flat character is one whose personality remains unchanged and uncomplicated throughout the story.**  
**A round character is a “complex character”, one whose personality is has many sides to it. This means that either it changes through the course of the story or the myriad personality traits of the character are revealed as the story progresses**
2. Is there a protagonist (main character)? Why do you think the author has chosen this character to be the protagonist

#### 3.3 Questions on how the text could be different

1. What is missing from the text? Is this deliberate? What purpose does it serve?
2. How could the text be different? Why is it the way it is?
3. Is anything being used out of context in the text? Is this deliberate? If so why?

#### 3.4 Political questions

1. Is there anything problematic in the text? Why has it been included?
2. Are any groups being excluded or marginalized in the text or in the implications of the text? Why has this been done by the author?
3. Is there any exclusionary language used in the text? Why has the author used such language?

#### 3.5 Personal engagement

1. How does this text relate to my personal experience?
2. How does my personal knowledge and experience affect the way I read the text?
3. Can my personal experience help me to evaluate the text?