Critical reading with "What is Math?"

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 piece from the start.

4. Next, consult the Question Bag below to guide you through the process of critically thinking about the text.

3 Question bag for critical reading of a piece of non fiction

3.1 General questions

1. What is the aim of this text? What in the text points to this aim?

3.2 Questions about the truth claims made within the text

1. what is the main claim of the piece?

2. Are there sub-claims?

3. Do any claims seem too certain?

   A claim or "argument" is the central idea of a paragraph or group of paragraphs or an entire essay. It should ideally be assertive, specific and provable. Good claims are not generalisations, cliches, questions or obvious statements

4. Are there claims which are based on authority for support? What kind of authority is it? Does this seem reasonable?

5. Are there claims which are based on evidence for support? What kind of evidence is it? Does this seem reasonable?

6. Are any generalisations being made? Are these generalisations reasonable here?

   A generalisation is a general statement considered true based on only a few pieces of evidence supporting it

7. Are any concepts being mixed-up?

8. Are any assumptions being made in this text?
   Assumptions are beliefs or ideas that are considered true without proof or evidence, but are still used to support reasoning.

   Assumptions might include:

   - _____ is important.
   - _____ is possible.
   - _____ might influence
   - _____ is a positive thing.
   - _____ is a negative thing.

9. Do these assumptions seem reasonable in this context? Why or why not?

3.3 Questions about how the text could be different

1. What is missing from the text?

2. How could the text be different?

3. Is anything being used out of context in the text?

3.4 Political questions

1. Is there anything problematic in the text?

2. Are any groups being excluded or marginalized in the text or in the implications of the claims?

3. Is there any exclusionary language used in the text?

4. What would the implications be, if we were to take the claims seriously? i.e. what would happen next?

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 claims?

4. What status does my personal experience have, in relation to the published research?

5. Can I find anything in the text to help me relate this to my personal experience?