



# Critical reading strategies

When you read academic books or articles at university you are expected to be critical and to ask questions about the author's intention, the evidence and the ideas used to convince the reader. Do not necessarily accept everything you read. Critical reading enables you to understand, analyse and make informed judgements and get the best information to develop your ideas for your assignments. Critical reading involves asking a series of questions, such as the following.

## Stage 1: Make an initial appraisal & evaluate the source

Firstly you need to decide if the source is worth reading and using by considering:

- What type of material is it?
  - Is it a journal article, textbook, report, blog, website? Is the type of material appropriate for your purpose?
  - If it is a journal article - is the journal peer-reviewed?
- What is the purpose of the material?
  - Is the author trying to persuade, inform or something else?
- Who is the likely audience?
  - Is it written for the general public, for researchers in the field, for students?
  - How will this change the way the material is written?
- Who wrote it?
  - What do you know about the author, their credibility in the field, and/or their previous research? (Check Google if you are not sure).
- When was it written?
  - Is it still relevant to current studies?

## Stage 2: Think critically about the information you are reading

As you read through the material note your answers to the following:

- What is significant or important about this chapter or reading?
  - How does this fit in with your other readings on the topic, the general field, your particular interests and assignments?
  - Is this a broad or narrow view of the topic?
- What claims are being made? What is the basis of the claims? What evidence is used?
  - Is the evidence reliable (consider other sources used, data and other evidence)?
  - Is there an obvious bias or agenda (ie. does the writer want you to be persuaded to support a particular view)?
- How logical are the ideas? Do the conclusions follow from the evidence?
  - Are there gaps in the argument or any sections when you think 'why'?
  - How valid and generalisable are the conclusions?
- Is there anything that is missing or not included?
  - What is not stated in the reading (evidence, opposing opinions, other perspectives)?
  - What are the limitations of the research (how many participants, how long, what variables)?