

Critical thinking (materials thanks to Kimberley Ducey from the Department of Sociology)

To think critically (or read a text critically) means we are reading it with a view to evaluating the way in which the authors approach, understand, and present a topic or issue. “Critical” does not necessarily mean “criticism”: a critical analysis means that you evaluate the main argument and weigh its significance for informed research and debate. The box that follows elaborates on this decisive point.

Often misunderstood is the word “critical.” A critical response is not simply a condemnation (e.g. the author is a hypocrite; this work stinks; this sucks; how could someone write trash like this?); it is an intelligent, informed, and succinct evaluation of the text. Is the argument—the author’s main point or thesis—clear or hidden? What is the author’s main argument/thesis? Does the author neglect certain information that may credit or discredit their argument? These are a few questions you should be asking yourself while you read for this course. Moreover, whenever you make a statement you must support your argument. To construct an informed argument, you must first try to sort out what you *know* about a subject from what you *think* about a subject. Alternatively put, you will want to consider what *is known* about a subject and then to determine what *you* think about a subject. Every convincing argument must have support. Keep the personal in check. Finally regarding **evidence vs. assumption vs. opinion**: Have you confused the three? Evidence is something that you can prove. Assumption is something that one can safely infer from the evidence at hand. Opinion is your own particular interpretation of the evidence.