CRITICAL READING SKILLS
WHAT IS CRITICAL READING? (1)

• Knowing your **purpose** - what do you want to get out of this piece of reading, ultimately?

• **Focusing** on what you need - read the sources you think will be most helpful for your purpose, focus on the most relevant sections, and only take notes on relevant information

• Choosing appropriate **reading strategies** - skimming, scanning, memorizing, rereading...

• **Thinking** critically about what you read - asking questions, challenging statements

> Don’t just collect information - think critically about the information you’re presented with, in order to **build your own argument**
IDENTIFYING SUITABLE SOURCES

• Three key questions:
  ➢ Is it relevant?
  ➢ Is it recent enough?
  ➢ Is it academic?
WHAT IS CRITICAL READING? (2)

Critical reading involves engaging with the text by asking questions rather than passively accepting what it says.

> Is the methodology sound?
> What was the purpose?
> Do ideas flow logically?
> Are arguments properly formulated?
> Is the evidence there to support what is being claimed?
MODEL 1: SQR3

• **Survey** - look at the front and back covers, scan the table of contents, look at the title, headings and subheadings, read the abstract, introduction and conclusion

• **Question** - what are the questions (you hope!) the text will answer? What questions do the title/introduction/conclusion prompt? What do you already know about this topic? What else might you need to know?

• **Read** - read slowly, section by section, returning to your questions, and write notes

• **Recite** - summarize key points from memory, and try to answer the questions you posed

• **Review** - go back over your notes and check they’re clear
MODEL 2: DESCRIBE, ANALYZE, EVALUATE

• Describe
  • Who is the text by? Who is the text aimed at?
  • What is the text about? What is its purpose?
  • Where is the problem/issue situated? When was the text written?

• Analyze
  • How does one factor affect another? How does this fit into the bigger picture?
  • Why did this issue arise? Why is this argument/theory a useful response?
  • What if this or that factor were added/altered/removed?

• Evaluate
  • So, what makes is significant/successful? What are the implications?
  • What next in terms of what can be learnt, or what needs doing?
READING STRATEGIES

- **Scanning** - looking over material quickly in order to pick out specific information; looking out for particular terms or phrases or names or headings

- **Skimming** - reading something fairly quickly to get the general gist

- **Close reading** - reading something in detail, slowly, and probably more than once!

You’ll probably need to do all three when reading an academic text: **scan** to determine scope and relevance, **skim** to pick out key facts and parts to explore further, **read more closely** to understand in more detail and think critically
TAKING NOTES

There is no right or wrong way - you just need to find a method that suits you!

For example...

- bullet points
- mind maps and diagrams
- highlighting
- annotating
- underlying
TAKING NOTES: DOS AND DON’TS

• Don’t attempt to write everything down!
• Don’t lose track of your purpose in taking notes - stay focused
• Don’t worry if you come across something you don’t understand - use question marks to flag uncertainty
• Don’t forget to revisit and reorganize your notes
• Don’t be afraid of trying out different methods of taking notes - lists, colours, bubbles, squares...
TACKLING DIFFICULT CONTENT

• Set time aside when you’ll be able to work without interruptions
• Read things more than once
• Try and summarize each paragraph in your own words
• Talk to a friend about it!
• Try taking a break and coming back to it later
• Register your response, and consider whether the text itself is at fault!