

# CRITICAL READING

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# **ERRORS ARE UNIVERSAL**

In Research

**EVERYBODY MAKES ERRORS !!!**

*Because of:*

## **KNOWLEDGE LIMITATIONS**

- Crossing Expertise Borderlines

*field of expertise*

*language*

*methodology*

- Unavailable data

- Time lag in updates

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

- Bias-induced distortions
- Excessive familiarity with subject, 'mental ruts'
  - Attention fluctuations

# STATISTICAL FACTORS

- *Large mass of details*
- *In particular names and numbers*

**CRITICISM:**  
An essential  
**PREVENTIVE / REMEDIAL TOOL**  
**AND A MAJOR DRIVER OF SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS**

*Can help:*

**CORRECT FACTS and IDEAS**

*(analysis, theory, criticism)*

**CORRECT STYLE**

**ADD INFORMATION**

*(bibliographical, factual)*

**INCREASE RECIPIENT'S AWARENESS OF PROBLEMS**

**Most useful & least painful/harmful during:**

**- DESIGN**

**- PLANNING**

of research project

Very useful during

**- IMPLEMENTATION**

**- REFEREEING/EDITING**

Can also be useful, but more painful/harmful

**- AFTER ORAL PAPER PRESENTATION**

**- DURING DEFENSE OF THESIS**

**- AFTER PUBLICATION**

# POTENTIAL SOURCES OF GOOD CRITICISM

## - **Experts/seniors:**

*Advisors/supervisors*

*Referees:*

*'External experts'*

*(Expertise)*

## - **Peers:**

*(More objective than author)*

## **Non-experts:**

(Outsider's view, problems more salient,  
but less relevant knowledge and expertise)

# MUCH CRITICISM IS UNJUSTIFIED

(Often due to misinterpretation)

but also

- *Showing off*

- *Self-centredness*

*(looking at one's own interests and priorities without  
acknowledging the author's)*

- *Self-defence*

*(if assessors believe their ideas/work  
are challenged in the text)*

but  
CRITICISM can be  
**USEFUL EVEN IF UNJUSTIFIED**

*Makes author aware of:*

- **Ambiguities**
- **Insufficiently explicit formulation**
- **Unclear formulation**

*Also shows Critic's:*

- **personal bias**
- **'political' bias**
- **attitudes**
- **competence**

*(or lack thereof)*

***CRITICISM IS “BAD” / OF LITTLE USE if:***

**- IRRELEVANT**

**(loss of time)**

**- DISHONEST**

**GOOD CRITICISM IS *GIVING***

**(time, attention)**

**STUDENTS RECEIVE FREE CRITICISM  
EXPERTS RECEIVE LITTLE GOOD CRITICISM  
AND SOME/MUCH 'POLITICAL' CRITICISM  
(Sociological factors)**

**ASK FOR IT, TAKE IT, THINK ABOUT IT**

**then**

**ACCEPT IT OR REJECT IT**

*Beginners:*

***UNDERSTAND THE REASON FOR CRITICISM***

***YOU RECEIVE***

***ASSESS THE CRITICISM CRITICALLY***

***Defend yourself only***

*if you think the criticism is unjustified*

***and may harm you***

*Sometimes, accepting the criticism gracefully*

*even if you think it is not justified*

*is the best strategy*

*(Defence of thesis)*

# OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES

*Introductory reminder:*

## **CRITICAL READING IS:**

Information collection + Analysis

with

Identification of strengths and weaknesses

# 1. READ FOR *CONSTRUCTIVE* REASONS

- *Gaining information* for one's own purposes  
(*gain information for one's own study*)
- *Disseminating information* for the benefit of others  
(*Reviews, bibliographical reports*)
  - *Preparing for better work*  
(*Studying other people's strengths and weaknesses*)
  - *Helping others* do better work  
(*Reporting and advising*)

## **2. MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND BEFORE ASSESSING**

Misperceptions are rife

The author-is-no-fool principle

## **3. BE SKEPTICAL TOWARDS YOUR OWN CRITICISM**

Personal bias is ever-present

Double-check if initially negative reaction

# **STRUCTURE OF A CRITICAL READING REPORT (AS AN EXERCISE)**

## **1. DESCRIPTION**

Objectives

Method(s)

Results

Discussion/Conclusion

## **2. ASSESSMENT OF SUBSTANCE**

....

## **3. ASSESSMENT OF FORM**

....

# 1. COMPREHENSION (1): AUTHOR'S OBJECTIVES

Research question

Hypothesis

Exploratory goals

- *Try to understand why the objectives were chosen*
- *Assessment should be based on the author's objectives,  
Not on the assessor's interests*

# **1. COMPREHENSION (2): AUTHOR'S METHOD**

- Theoretical development/logical testing/empirical
  - Observational/Experimental
- Survey/Interview/Text analysis/Lab experiment

...

**What did the author actually do ?**

*Could you explain the procedure in a few sentences ?*

## **RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

- Facts
- Categories
- Numbers
- Opinions

## **AUTHOR'S CONCLUSIONS**

(If any)

- Hypothesis strengthened or not
  - Valuable method or not
  - Problems discovered
- Other methods/further studies required

## **2. ASSESSMENT of SUBSTANCE**

### **OBJECTIVES**

- Relevant to general issue?
  - Useful?
  - Feasible?

### **METHOD**

(Design, implementation)

- Appropriate?
- Best under circumstances?
- Can you think of a better one?

## **FACTS**

- Correct?
- Were all available and relevant facts used?

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Are the most relevant references there?
  - Is the list up-to-date?
  - Are all entries correct?  
*(Spelling, year, pages, publisher, place)*
- Do all entries have enough added value?
  - 'Political' bias (positive or negative)?

## **INFERENCES**

- Logically appropriate?

(No skipping, over-interpreting, over-generalizing)

- Explicit, including references/explanations?
  - Are facts fully exploited?
    - Statistics

## **CONCLUSION**

- Based on results?  
(inferences OK?)

### **3. ASSESSMENT of PRESENTATION**

#### **STRUCTURE OF TEXT**

- Internal "logic"
- Explanations  
*(Objectives, method, inferences)*
- Balance between the various parts
  - Excessive length ?

#### **LANGUAGE**

- Clear?
  - Correct?
  - Wordy?
  - Terminology
- (Appropriate, explained, typographical highlighting)*

# **CONVENTIONS**

- Explicitness
- Style
- Typographical conventions
- Bibliography

# **ILLUSTRATIONS**

- Clear?
- Justified?

# **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Body of text vs. List of references
- Full references? (pages, publisher, place)

# OVERALL ASSESSMENT DEPENDING ON TYPE OF ASSESSMENT

- For *improvement*  
(giving advice - careful)

- For *learning*  
(noting - straightforward)

- For *testing*  
(theses/dissertations, papers/projects  
in selection procedures):

*depends on selection criteria*

- For *dissemination*  
(careful)

## DIFFERENT RELATIVE WEIGHTS of

- innovative content, norm compliance,
- quality of presentation

## PRACTICAL ADVICE (1)

- Read with pencil and paper.
- Use pencil to underline and write in margins
  - Always write down *full* references of text  
(including place where available)
- Write down verbatim important text segments
- *Write synopsis of objectives, methods, results and conclusion*

## PRACTICAL ADVICE (2)

- *Write down verbatim segments that you are going to criticize*
  - *Read several times any segment that you feel critical about to make sure your criticism is justified*
- *Try to get clarification from author by writing to him/her*
  - *Symbols for relative importance*  
*(underlining, \*)*
  - *Keyword method*  
*(Note keywords in the margins)*

# REPORTING/REVIEWING

## MUST BE USEFUL TO RECIPIENTS

- (Readers or decision makers)  
and, if possible, to author

### **Provide Assessment** + Information

- If negative, not more than necessary
- List strong points and weaknesses
- Also give an overall assessment
  
- For each point, try *to indicate facts*
- Careful with criticism: make sure it is justified
- Try to send draft report to author for reaction  
(Sometimes your misperceptions can be corrected)

# EXERCICE

READ TEXT X CRITICALLY

WRITE IN max. 200 WORDS A CLEAR AND INFORMATIVE SUMMARY OF ITS CONTENT

WRITE A CRITICAL REPORT EVALUATING

- THE DESIGN AS A FUNCTION OF THE OBJECTIVE
- THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DESIGN
  - THE INFERENCES MADE
  - WHERE DOES THE INNOVATION OF THE WORK LIE?
- HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE OVERALL VALUE OF THE TEXT?  
(0 NIL - 1 LOW - 2 MODERATE - 3 HIGH - 4 VERY HIGH)

FOR EACH 'NEGATIVE' CRITICISM, PROVIDE AT LEAST ONE EXAMPLE FROM THE TEXT TO BACK IT