

Strategies for Critical Thinking and Reading

This handout is based on a presentation delivered by Drs. Louis Newman and Nicholas Santascy at Stanford's Center for Teaching and Learning. I encourage you to consider academic coaching which is available at <https://studentlearning.stanford.edu/academic-skills/academic-coaching>.

Questions about context:

- What is the historical context in which the author is writing?
- What question(s) is the author attempting to answer?
- What argument(s) does the author offer to address the question?
- What assumptions is the author making? (Assumptions are things accepted as true, usually without proof)
- Which concepts or definitions does the author develop?

Questions about evidence:

- What evidence does the author offer to support the argument?
- Is the evidence convincing?
- Does it support the author's argument?
- Is the source of the evidence credible?
- What other evidence might challenge the argument?

Questions about alternatives:

- What are other questions that the author might have asked but did not consider?
- What are some alternative arguments that might answer the question?
- What are some other interpretations of the evidence?

Questions about implications:

- Why is this argument important beyond the author's text?
- If we accept the argument, what are the consequences for our beliefs and for future research?
- How might this argument apply in other contexts?

Other resources:

- Stanford provides materials focused on navigating the challenges of college-level reading: <https://studentlearning.stanford.edu/academic-skills/tips-and-tools/reading>.
- Harvard has a helpful page on thinking-intensive reading, which may be helpful especially for articles about which you plan to write: <https://guides.library.harvard.edu/friendly.php?s=sixreadinghabits&gid=4877>.
- Stanford also has excellent guides on note-taking (see especially the one of the Cornell method): <https://studentlearning.stanford.edu/academic-skills/tips-and-tools/note-taking>.