Being able to read critically will help you understand and remember what you are reading as well as help you prepare to write a good essay or paper.

Key steps to being a critical reader:
- **Participate.** Do not sit back and read passively. Before starting your reading, skim the entire text so that you know what to expect. As you read, do not let your mind wander so that you end up just looking at words on a page. Be an active reader by keeping your focus on what you are reading.
- **Analyze.** Simplify the complex parts into simpler parts. Break down the large parts into smaller parts. Examine each major idea separately and look for its supporting details. Then, look at how the major ideas connect and form the whole.
- **Question.** Be aware that writers have their own opinions. They are trying to persuade their readers to agree with their opinions and thoughts. Look out for faulty reasoning, omissions, or hidden assumptions. Do not assume that the author’s thoughts are entirely correct (or entirely wrong). Ask yourself questions about the validity of the author’s thoughts—make your own judgments and come to your own conclusions.

How a critical reader approaches a text:
- **Have a purpose for reading.** Are you reading to gather facts or to understand an idea? Are you reading to prepare for a test? Your purpose will determine how you will approach your reading.
- **Preview what you will be reading.** First, note the title and author and read any information about the author. Then, quickly look over what you will be reading by scanning the pages and noting any headings and subheadings in order to determine the important points.
- **Gauge your reading time.** See how long the text is and estimate how long it will take to read it. Try not to read too much at one sitting. Break down your reading periods into reasonable lengths of time so that your brain will be able to absorb information gradually. A gradual accumulation of information will allow information to move into your memory more easily. A critical reader needs to allow time for thinking about the material.
- **Respond to the reading.** Reacting to the text is the most important phase of critical reading. Some readers underline or highlight words, phrases, important points and passages; however, this may be a passive process if the reader is not thinking about how the underlined material is important. It is therefore recommended that you take notes, putting the material in your own words. Taking notes is an active process that forces you to constantly evaluate and organize the ideas as you gain understanding. Some readers write notes in the margins of the text, but these notes are scattered and may be difficult to use later.

Suggestions for Note-Taking:
- **Take notes in a notebook or on index cards.** Organizing your notes will enable you to study and review what you have read more quickly and efficiently. Your notes will give you an early start if you will be writing an essay or paper on your reading material.
- **Summarize the text.** Write, in your own words, the main ideas and supporting points, going back later to fill in the details.
- **Include your reactions, agreement or disagreement, or any reservations, but keep these comments separate from your summary of the material.**
- **Include page or paragraph numbers** so you can easily refer to specific material for future use.
- **When you finish reading,** outline the main ideas and supporting points to see how the ideas were organized and related and how the thesis (theme or argument) was developed.