INSIDE TRACK

CRITICAL THINKING & ANALYSIS

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provide ways for you to enter the conversation about the topic you are investigating and to begin to contribute to the debates.

THE SQ3R TECHNIQUE FOR READING EFFICIENTLY

You will quickly find that there is more information out there than you can easily deal with. One technique that has been suggested for improving your critical reading skills and your retention of what you have read is called 'Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review' (SQ3R) (Figure 2.6).

- **S**urvey: determine what the text is about – read table of contents, look at the index
- **Q**uestion: what are the questions you hope the text will answer?
- **R**ead the text carefully, and take bibliographic information for your records
- **R**ecall: what were the most important or most relevant points for your study?
- **R**eview: go back to the text and check that you have remembered the main points correctly.

Using the SQ3R technique will help you check that you have understood what you read. It is a careful and possibly time-consuming process. However, when you are new to an area, when you extend yourself into areas that you are less familiar with, or when you recognise that a source you are reading is important to your area, the SQ3R technique will force you to read carefully. It is not something that you have to do for all your reading, though reflecting and making sure that you understand what you have read is always important.

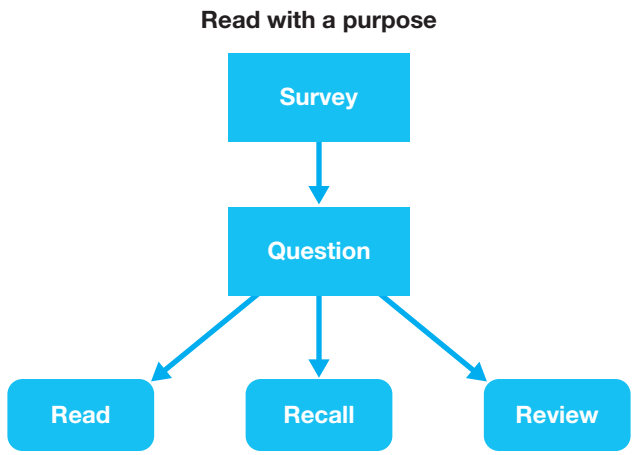

Figure 2.6 The SQ3R technique

SUMMARY

This chapter has explored how to read for references, recognise names and recognise dates in order to improve your awareness of the literature in your academic field. The main message of this chapter is that you should take every opportunity to join the scholarly conversation in your discipline by thinking critically about the sources you read.

The main arguments in this chapter were:

- Look for clues in the sources you read
- Learn from the ways in which academic authors draw on the literature
- Get to know the main names in your field.

Answers to quiz questions on p.17

1 This article brings together three discrete issues (paragraphs 4, 5 and 6) to create a new understanding of stereotype content that can be used to describe different out-groups (paragraph 7).

2 Stereotyping can be studied as a process, or it can be studied based on the content of the stereotypes (paragraph 2).

3 This article studies the content of stereotypes (paragraph 3).

4 Low warmth, high competence.

5 Rich people (paragraph 1), Asians (paragraph 5), Jews, career women (paragraph 11).

6 Groups are evaluated according to the group's intent toward the in-group (warmth), and how effective they will be in pursuing that intention (competence) (paragraph 9).

Reference

Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J. C., Glick, P. and Xu, J. (2002) A Model of (often mixed) Stereotype Content: Competence and Warmth Respectively follow from Perceived Status and Competition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82: 878–902.

3 BUILDING ON SCHOLARSHIP

This chapter continues to examine how you can make a contribution as a scholar by building on existing research. It addresses the difficulty of critiquing sources and offers advice about identifying the limitations of the sources you read in order to help you to develop your own stance as an academic writer.

This chapter covers:

- Who me? Building on scholarship
- Mind the gap
- Too descriptive!
- Examples of critical thinking
- Where do you stand? Stance in academic writing.

Using this chapter

INTRODUCTION

We have tried to emphasise that critical thinking is an active skill. When you read, you need to maintain a questioning stance and ask questions such as:

- **What is my purpose in reading this?**
- **Is it relevant to my needs?**
- **What is the basis for the claims that are being made here?**
- **If these claims are true, what does it mean for the decisions I have to make?**

Critical thinking as an active skill involves not simply gathering and evaluating information, important as these activities are. Critical thinking is a tool for you to get involved in knowledge creation and make your own contribution to knowledge. In this chapter, we will discuss how you can use your reading to build on existing scholarship.

WHO ME? BUILDING ON SCHOLARSHIP

Students often think that academics do not want to hear their ideas. They may think that academics want them to reproduce – as accurately as possible – what they have learned in their lectures and from their assigned readings. However, that is not usually the case. Although there are areas in which accurately reproducing knowledge is critical and will be tested, often this occurs at the beginning of learning a new area or discipline. As you become more knowledgeable in an area, your tutors want to know *what you can do with your knowledge*, what you can contribute.

Tutors do not want uninformed speculation. At university you should produce ideas with more basis than you could expect by asking the people who happened to be on a cross-town bus. Your ideas must be based on what you have learned through your studies, but then your ideas should increase or refine what is already known. One lecturer in Human Resource Management spoke of this in terms of the two large groups of students he had on his courses. He made this observation:

> Overseas students have a perception that what you want from them is the right answer, and that right answer is to be found in books, and therefore they will give you the books, 'cause that's surely what you want.
>
> UK students tend to almost an opposite point of view, which is what you want from them is their opinion, with zero reference to any books… actually, we have an academic model of what we expect from them, which is somewhere in the middle, and these students, who are UK and overseas, are on opposite sides of it, and we're trying to bring both of them into the middle.
>
> (Lecturer from Human Resources Management 2010)

These comments from the lecturer generalise broadly about overseas and UK students. According to this view, both overseas and UK students exercise critical thinking skills, whilst some overseas students give opinions without basing them on solid information and some UK students give information from their reading without considering it critically. Perhaps it is best to avoid generalisations, while accepting that what tutors want (most of the time) is informed judgement.

Reading and action

At university, many marking schemes reflect tutors' desire for an informed contribution that will build on existing knowledge. For example, the marking criteria listed in Table 3.1 describe the qualities expected at distinction level for undergraduate study.

Reading	Action
Evidence of wide-ranging reading and/or research Demonstrates wide reading around the subject, both in printed and web-based form Shows a rigorous use and a good understanding of relevant source materials Good use of secondary literature Shows clear evidence of wide and relevant reading and an engagement with the conceptual issues	Independent, critical thought Demonstrates an ability to identify key issues in a debate and critically assess, reflect upon and contextualise the evidence and arguments related to that debate Evidence of initiative and independent thought Evidence of developing capacity for independent thought with respect to ideas, aims and approach Contains evidence of sound independent thinking, presenting material in an original fashion

Table 3.1 Sample marking criteria

These criteria suggest what tutors may be looking for when they read assignments. They want evidence that students have carefully read and absorbed not only the readings that they have suggested, but also that they have gone beyond those readings to find other relevant sources that throw light on the topic. They also want these readings to be brought together in a way that shows independent thinking.

MIND THE GAP

As you study the literature in your field, you should be asking yourself, 'What is my purpose in reading this?' In the relatively recent past, say, 30 years ago, finding information on a topic was difficult and it required extended searches in the library which were limited by the size of the library. Now the challenge is to find the bit of information that you need when so much information is quickly available, especially

online. The analogy of drinking from a fire hose is sometimes used to express the overwhelming volume of information that is available on any conceivable topic. In order to keep your focus clear, keep asking, 'Why am I reading this?'

In part, you are reading to gain an understanding of the field, to pick up knowledge that you did not have previously. In part, though, you are reading in order to find out what other people also do not know. This is where your own contribution will grow. After describing what is known, summarising as carefully as possible and highlighting the points that are relevant to your argument, you will need to say what you have found out.

Student writers

Student writers frequently have difficulty at this stage, for two reasons. First, they may lack confidence in critiquing published writers who might be senior academics. Students tell themselves something like, 'They've been studying this topic for years; how can I think I've come up with a problem that they haven't answered already?' Secondly, student writers sometimes worry that they do not have any basis for questioning the information that they read in academic articles. They know that they have not conducted experiments or interviewed participants.

These worries can be addressed by critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is democratic. If you think clearly, it does not matter whether you are a student or an academic, you can question what other people say. And, although you may not have conducted formal experiments, you have your own experience that you can draw upon.

Thinking outside the box

Academics occasionally describe their own experiences of questioning – or failing to question – what they read. Laurie Taylor, a sociologist at Birkbeck College, University of London, described how he started studying psychology at university. When he started, psychology was dominated by behaviourism, the belief that psychological knowledge could only advance by studying people's behaviour, rather than trying to understand what went on in their minds. Behaviourists felt that the best way to understand human behaviour was to study how rats responded to conditioning: that is, by rewarding rats with food (or punishing them) to see how quickly they changed their behaviour in response to the rewards or punishment. See what Taylor (2010) wrote about this on the page opposite.

In this passage, Taylor admits that he failed to compare what he was learning with what he already knew about people when he started studying psychology as an undergraduate. In the whole article, he goes on to explain that he knew that people did not simply act based on rewards and punishment, but also out of curiosity, malice and generosity, among other motivations that could not be reduced to punishment and rewards. Taylor began to revise his opinions of behaviourism when he read a critical book review by the linguist, Noam Chomsky, that made him reconsider what he had been taught.