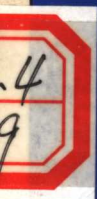


McGraw-Hill  
Basic  
Skills

# Critical Reading Improvement

Second Edition

Anita Harnadek



# Critical Reading Improvement

A Program for  
Self-Instruction

Second Edition

ANITA HARNADEK  
Lincoln High School  
Warren, Michigan

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## CRITICAL READING IMPROVEMENT

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# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

This book is both a programmed book and a textbook in which an answer is given to nearly every question asked. Each of the first seven chapters gives you certain things to look for in your reading and gives you practice in finding these things. Chapter 8 gives you practice in finding all the things discussed in the first seven chapters.

In most programmed books, only one answer is right. In this book, it is possible that some of your answers will be right even though they don't agree with my answers. This is because some answers will depend on the way we interpret what we read. That is, if I interpret something differently than you do, then my answer to a question about the material may be different from your answer to the same question. I will support my answer, and I will try to think of other interpretations and tell what's wrong with them. But I might not think of and refute *your* interpretation. In this case, you will have to decide whether or not your answer is right.

Because this book is programmed, it can be used by someone who wants to study by himself. But the question of different interpretations also makes the book good for use in discussion classes.

As you read this book, you will see that you are supposed to respond in various ways. Sometimes you will be asked a question. For example,  
1. What kind of book are you reading now? Support your answer.  
In this case, the question will be separated from my answer by a light rule.

---

The first sentence above says this book is a programmed book and it is a textbook. The third paragraph says it is a book which can be used for individual study or in a discussion class. The book's title should make you think the book is about improving critical reading ability. Count your answer as correct if you answered in any of these five ways.

Material following my answer will be separated from my answer by a dark rule.

---

You can read my answer as soon as you read a question, but you will learn more if you think of your own answer first, so you should block out my answer while you are thinking of your own answer.

Sometimes the problem will be a multiple-choice question. More than one right answer may be included in the choices. Here, too, my answer is separated both from the question and from the material which follows the answer. In most cases, explanations will be given both for answers I choose and for answers I reject.

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2. What do you know so far about this book?

- a. It is supposed to improve critical reading ability.
- b. It is designed to be used as a textbook in discussion classes.
- c. It is written by an expert on critical reading.
- d. It includes answers to most of the questions asked.

---

*a, d.* From the answer to question 1 above, we know that answer *a* is right. From the first sentence of the first paragraph, we know that answer *d* is right. If you chose *b*, you probably misread the second sentence of the third paragraph: the sentence says this book is *good* for use in discussion classes, but it does not say that this book is *designed* for use in discussion classes (not *b*). You have not been told anything to suggest that I am an expert on critical reading (not *c*).

---

Sometimes you will be given certain information, and then you will be asked to decide whether each statement following that information is true, is false, or whether you can't tell its truth value from the information given. For example,

Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water. Jack fell down and broke his crown and Jill came tumbling after.

3. Jack and Jill were married.

---

Can't tell. We are not told anything about their relationship. From what we are told, they may or may not have been married.

---

4. There was water at the top of the hill.

---

Can't tell. There may or may not have been. Maybe they asked someone from the other side of the hill to leave a pail of water there for them, and they just went to pick it up.

---

Sometimes incomplete sentences will be written down one side of a page, and the correct responses will be written down the other side. In this case, block out the column of answers, uncovering each answer as you respond.

It is hoped that this book will help you improve your ability to \_\_\_\_\_ critically.

read

Although this book is designed for self-study, it is also (designed, good) for use as a textbook in a discussion class.

good

You will be expected to respond in (only one, several) ways.

Your ability to read \_\_\_\_\_ will improve more if you think of your own answers before reading mine than if you simply read my answers.

several

critically

Other kinds of responses expected will be explained when you get to them.

A critical reader asks one big question as he reads:

AM I REALLY *THINKING* ABOUT WHAT I'M READING?

This big question can be broken down into many other questions, some of which are these:

1. What kind of publication is this?
2. What is the author's background in this subject?
3. To whom is the author writing?
4. Am I thinking that the author has said things which he hasn't really said at all?
5. Does the author make inconsistent statements?
6. What has the author assumed to be true? Which of these assumptions are stated? Which of these assumptions are not stated?
7. Does a particular statement depend on context for its intended meaning?
8. What does the author imply? What does he insinuate? What might he hope the reader will infer?
9. Why is the author writing this? (What's his motive, his purpose?)
10. What is the author's attitude? What tone does he use? What are his biases?
11. Does the author mean what he says, or is he making his point in a round-about way through humor, satire, irony, or sarcasm?
12. Are the author's words to be taken exactly as they appear, or are they slang, idioms, or figures of speech?
13. Which of the author's statements are facts? Which are opinions?
14. Does the author write emotionally? Does he use sentiment, name-calling, flag waving, terror, horror, or other emotional means to make his point?
15. Which of the author's statements does he support? Which does he leave unsupported? Which of the unsupported statements should he support?
16. What conclusions does the author reach?
17. Of the conclusions the author reaches, which ones are justified? Which ones are not justified?

The critical reader is able to answer questions like those above. This means that the critical reader

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1. does *not* believe everything he reads.
2. questions everything which doesn't make sense to him.
3. questions some things even though they do make sense to him.
4. rereads when he thinks he may have missed something.
5. considers the type of material he is reading before deciding how much weight to give it.
6. admits that the effect on him of what the author says may be caused more by the author's style of writing than by the facts presented.
7. analyzes arguments.
8. discounts arguments based on faulty reasoning.
9. has good reasons for believing some things and disbelieving others—for agreeing with some authors and disagreeing with others.

As you read the answers given in this book, you are strongly urged to read the reasons for accepting some answers and rejecting others. It is a big temptation to read an answer just far enough to see that your answer agrees with mine; but critical reading is not possible without critical thinking, and the answers are designed to show you the thinking which led up to them.

Some concepts are discussed in specific sections in order to identify them for you and give you special practice in recognizing them. Included in this group are, for example, some of the common errors in thinking. Other concepts are not discussed in separate sections but will appear many times throughout this book in the hope that you will learn to look for them automatically when you read. Included in this group are such things as recognizing conflicting information and considering the context in interpreting what you read.

It will be a healthy sign that you're well on your way to reading more critically when two factors are present during your other reading: first, you find yourself automatically asking the kinds of questions asked throughout this book—questions such as those asked in the list of questions above; second, you find yourself realizing that you're getting more out of reading than you did before you started reading this book.



# Chapter 2.

## Considering the Source

In this chapter, we will see what lies behind asking the first three questions listed in Chapter 1. These questions are:

- 1. What kind of publication is this?
- 2. What is the author’s background in this subject?
- 3. To whom is the author writing?

The critical reader does not place equal weight on everything he reads, for he knows that some sources are more reliable than others. For example, suppose someone writes a letter in Hebrew to someone else. Then suppose a third person reads the letter and translates it into Greek. Then suppose someone else translates it from the Greek into Italian, and then a fifth person translates the Italian version into English. Now if someone who understands both Hebrew and English were to read both the original letter and the English version, he would not expect the two letters to be exactly the same. In deciding what the writer really said, the reader would, of course, give more weight to the original letter than to the English version of the letter.

The original of any document is called a *primary* source. Any document which interprets or quotes from another document is called a *secondary* source.

If you want to find out how much someone was charged for his car, then the bill of sale for the car would be a (primary, secondary) source.

primary

A letter telling what price was shown on the bill of sale would be a (primary, secondary) source.

secondary

If you wanted to find out what a law said, the bill voted on in the legislature would be a (primary, secondary) source, and a book containing descriptions of laws passed would be a (primary, secondary) source.

primary

secondary

Assuming that a reader can understand what both a primary and a secondary source say, then the (primary, secondary) source is the better source.

primary

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Aside from the question of whether the source is primary or secondary, one of the most obvious things to be considered by a reader—and yet one of the things too often not considered at all—is the kind of publication being read.

For example, a discussion of the contents of rock formations around Denver, Colorado, is likely to be (less, more) accurate in a novel than in a college geography book, but the beauty of these rocks is likely to be (less, more) easily visualized from the description in a novel than from a college geography book.	less more
---	--------------

An article on the psychological need for sleep is likely to be (less, more) factual if it appears in <i>The Psychological Review</i> than if it appears in <i>Reader's Digest</i> .	more
---	------

An advertisement in an engineering journal is likely to be (less, more) sophisticated than an advertisement for the same product in a TV program magazine.	more
--	------

Along with the kind of publication, we must also consider the audience for whom the publication is intended.

For example, we can expect the content of the Denver rock formations to be discussed (less, more) thoroughly in a fifth-grade geography book than in a college geography book.	less
--	------

We can expect a (more, less) objective report of the activities of strikebreakers in a public daily newspaper than we can either in a union newspaper or in a company newspaper.	more
--	------

We can expect (less, more) sensational handling of the news of a Hollywood divorce in a movie magazine than in a family magazine.	more
---	------

Reading about a breakthrough in medicine, we can expect (less, more) sensational and (less, more) factual handling in a newspaper than in the American Medical Association's monthly journal.	more less
---	--------------

And, finally, even after considering the kind of publication and the audience for whom it is intended, we must consider both the author and the kind of material he is writing.

For example, a newspaper editorial about a proposed revision of abortion laws is likely to be written on (the same, a different) basis than such an article by a Catholic bishop.	a different
An article by a commentator will be (less, more) objective than a news release on the same subject by the Associated Press.	less
An article on the adoption of a child written by a couple frustrated by adoption laws is likely to be written from (the same, a different) viewpoint (as, than) if written by an adoption agency.	a different than
An article by a sympathetic reporter about a couple living on welfare is likely to have (about the same, quite a different) effect on us (as, than) an article by an unsympathetic reporter.	quite a different than
We would expect information about law to be (less, more) reliable if written by a lawyer than if written by an assembly worker.	more
But we would expect information about working conditions in a factory to be (less, more) reliable if written by a lawyer than if written by an assembly worker.	less

Several kinds of publications are listed below. Using the grading scale shown here, try to decide how reliable each publication is. You may also use A-, B+, B-, C+, C-, and D+. Count your answer as correct if you are within half a grade of the answer given. (Example: If you have B or C+ and the given answer is B-, count your answer as correct.)

**A—HIGHLY RELIABLE:** errors and misleading statements are extremely rare; no sensationalism; opinions are clearly distinguished from facts; authors are unusually reliable and qualified.

**B—QUITE RELIABLE:** few errors or misleading statements; seldom sensational; opinions are usually clearly distinguished from facts; authors are usually reliable and qualified.

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C—FAIRLY RELIABLE: some errors or misleading statements, but usually not about the *basic* facts; may be sensational; opinions may not be distinguished from facts; authors may not always be reliable and qualified.

D—SOMEWHAT RELIABLE: careful reading is required to distinguish basic facts from insinuations about them; often sensational; opinions seldom distinguished from facts; authors are almost anyone who has something to say.

X—reliability of the publication will depend primarily on the author, rather than on the type of publication. (Do not include textbooks in this category.)

Here are the publications for you to rate:

1. <i>Encyclopedia Americana</i>	A
2. <i>Encyclopedia Britannica</i>	A
3. <i>Journal of Genetic Psychology</i> (magazine)	A—
4. Magazine about movie stars	D
5. Tenth-grade textbook on plane geometry	B+
6. Twelfth-grade textbook on third-year algebra	A—
7. <i>The Scientific American</i> (magazine)	B+
8. <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> (magazine)	B—
9. <i>Reader's Digest</i> (magazine)	C
10. Political speech	D
11. Reputable daily newspaper	C
12. <i>Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary</i>	A
13. Book: biography by someone who knew the person	X
14. Book: biography by someone who didn't know the person	X
15. Historical novel (evaluate on the accuracy of history in the novel)	X
16. This book	B—

### SUMMARY

Some kinds of publications are generally more reliable than others. For example, a primary source is more reliable than a secondary source. An encyclopedia is more reliable than a child's story book. A medical book with a current copyright is more reliable than a medical book written 100 years ago. If you are thinking that there are exceptions to each of the last three statements, then you are right and you are reading critically. But *usually* the statements are true.

Publications intended for some audiences are generally more reliable than

publications intended for other audiences. For example, a science textbook written for gifted students is probably more reliable than a science textbook written for slow learners. In general, a publication intended for a more intelligent audience or for people who specialize in a field will be more reliable than a publication intended for a less intelligent audience or for people who are laymen in that field.

And finally, some kinds of authors are more reliable than others. For example, an article telling about changes needed in the Navy would be more reliable if written by a retired Navy admiral than if written by a teacher who was never in the Navy. But an article about changes needed in education would be more reliable if written by the teacher than if written by the admiral. This is not to say that the admiral must tell the truth about the Navy and lie about education or that the teacher must lie about the Navy and tell the truth about education. But it says that if we have no other facts to judge by, then it makes good sense to give more weight to the words of the person with first-hand experience.

# Chapter 3.

## Recognizing What Is Said

In this chapter, we will look at two common mistakes in reasoning which readers make. We will also try to answer the fourth question listed in Chapter 1:

4. Am I thinking that the author has said things which he hasn't really said at all?

When we read, it is natural to use our past experiences to help us interpret the words so that they make sense to us. But since we have all had different experiences, it follows that we may interpret the words in a way which is different than that which the author intended.

Although this danger cannot be entirely avoided, it can be minimized by learning not to take too much for granted when we read. It is one thing to decide what an author means and to know that we might be mistaken. But it is a different thing—and a stumbling block to critical reading—to take for granted that the author thinks just as we do.

One of our problems in reading, then, is to recognize when an author has made certain statements and when he has not made these statements.

Suppose someone writes, "I have to fill the gas tank of my car about four times a week." Then it is safe for us to assume that (choose one)

- a. the author drives a lot.
- b. the author's car gets poor gas mileage.
- c. both *a* and *b* are true.
- d. neither *a* nor *b* is necessarily true.

---

d. Maybe someone keeps siphoning gas out of the tank. Maybe the author has three teenagers who use the car continually. Maybe the gas tank holds only 5 gallons of gas. Maybe the gas tank leaks. According to what the author writes, both *a* and *b* *might* be true, but neither *a* nor *b* *has* to be true.

---

Most of the rest of the material in this chapter is so familiar to you that it might seem rather silly to you to read it. However, this material was chosen just *because* it is so familiar to you. It is easy to think that an author has said something which he has not said at all. But it is easiest to do this when we are reading something we think we've read or heard before.

Following are some shortened nursery rhymes and fairy tales. Each is followed by several statements. You are to mark each statement as "true," "false," or "can't tell." *In deciding how to mark the statements, you must accept*

*the story as true and assume that good English is used, but you may not add to the story, and you may not use any past knowledge of the story. You may use your knowledge of the world in deciding on meanings of common words—such as “house,” “girl,” and “pie,” for example.*

The statements which you are to mark do not pretend to discuss the important parts of the selection. But they will help you get into the habit of telling the difference between what an author says and what you infer about what he says. Again, it is a good idea to keep each answer covered until you have decided on your own answer.

- I. Little Jack Horner sat in the corner  
Eating a Christmas pie.  
He put in his thumb and pulled out a plum  
And said, “What a good boy am I!”

#### 1. Jack Horner was little.

Since the story says “*Little Jack Horner*,” an answer of “true” is acceptable. But an answer of “can’t tell” is better, because we don’t know whether the author is describing Jack as “little” or whether Jack is 6 feet tall and is named “*Little Jack Horner*” to distinguish him from “*Big Jack Horner*,” who is 7 feet tall.

#### 2. Jack was sitting in the corner while he was eating.

True. The story says he “sat in the corner eating.” The use of the present participle of the verb “eat” means that he was doing both at the same time.

#### 3. Jack was eating a plum pie.

Can’t tell. He pulled a plum out of the pie, but maybe it was an apple pie and the plum fell in by mistake.

#### 4. Jack was sitting on a chair.

Can’t tell. The story doesn’t say what Jack was sitting on.

#### 5. Jack was a good boy.

Can’t tell. Jack *said* he was a good boy, but maybe Jack was a liar.

- II. There was an old woman who lived in a shoe. She had so many children she didn’t know what to do.

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### 1. The woman was old.

---

If you marked your answer "can't tell," then your answer may be either right or wrong. It is *wrong* if you reasoned like this: "I can't tell, because what may be 'old' to the author may not be 'old' to me." You were told to accept the story as true, and the story says the woman is old. Therefore, the woman is old. (This reasoning also makes a "true" answer correct.) However, a "can't tell" is correct if you reasoned like this: "The author may have been talking about a woman who was old, or he may have been talking about someone's wife. If he was talking about a woman who was old, then the statement is true. But some people say 'old woman' instead of 'wife,' and if the author used 'old woman' this way, then we don't know whether or not the woman was old."

---

### 2. The woman must have been very small in order to be able to live in a shoe.

---

False. She didn't *have* to be small in order to be able to live in a shoe, because it could have been a big shoe. If the statement had read, "The old woman was small," then we would mark it "can't tell," for we don't know whether she was small or whether the shoe was big.

---

### 3. The woman's children lived in the shoe with her.

---

Can't tell. The story says the old woman had children, but it doesn't tell us where the children lived.

---

### 4. The woman didn't really live in a shoe, but her house was so small that she *called* it a shoe.

---

False. We are told to accept the story as true, and the story says she lived in a shoe.

---

### 5. The old woman had a pet cat.

---

Can't tell. The story doesn't mention a cat, so we can't tell whether or not she had one.

---

A common error made by readers is to assume that anything not in the story must be false. Many readers will react to statement 5 above, "That's false. The story doesn't say anything about a cat, so if you try to say she could have had one, then you're adding to the story, and you're not allowed to do that." The answer to this line of reasoning is in two parts: first, we do not



add to the story by saying that *maybe* the story left something out; second, the person who marks this statement “false” is assuming that the old woman definitely did not have a pet cat, and so this person is adding to the story by making this assumption. The story does not mention a pet at all, so two possibilities exist: (1) the woman had a pet; (2) the woman didn’t have a pet. Since we cannot assume either of these to be true (or false) without adding to the story, we have to mark the statement “can’t tell.”

When we assume that anything not in the story is false, we are using one form of the reasoning error known as “*proof*” by failure to find a counterexample. A counterexample is a specific example which is used to disprove a generalization. For instance, suppose someone says, “All babies are born with blue eyes.” A counterexample would be (choose the correct answer):

- a. Some babies are not born with blue eyes.
- b. All babies are born with brown eyes.
- c. No babies are born with blue eyes.
- d. Bobby Jackson had brown eyes when he was born.

---

d. Statements *a*, *b*, and *c* are all generalizations, and it was said above that a counterexample is a *specific* example. A counterexample names one or more specific examples which run counter to a generalization.

---

A counterexample to the statement, “All birds can fly,” would be:

- a. An elephant can’t fly.
- b. Not all birds can fly.
- c. This bird can’t fly.
- d. It is false that all birds can fly.

---

c. Neither *b* nor *d* names a *specific* example to refute the given statement. Although statement *a* names an example of *something* which can’t fly, it does not name an example of a *bird* which can’t fly, and so it is not a counterexample to the given statement.

---

A counterexample to the statement, “No dog has five legs,” would be:

- a. This dog doesn’t have five legs.
- b. John’s dog has five legs.
- c. Some dogs have five legs.
- d. This spider has five legs.

---

b. Statement *b* names a specific example—John’s dog—which runs counter to the given generalization. Statement *a* is a specific example, but it supports the generalization. Statement *c* is not a specific example. Statement *d* is a specific example, but it does not refute the statement about *dogs*.

---