

Critical Reading V: Analyzing Data and Evidence

You may think the word “critical” has only a negative meaning, as in “Professor Smith criticized my paper unfairly.” However, a critical reader is a careful reader. According to Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, one meaning of the word critical is “exercising or involving careful judgment or judicious evaluation.” In other words, critical reading means being able to comprehend and make educated judgments about what you read.

The skills involved in critical reading are explained in Critical Reading Tip Sheets I-VI.

What are Supporting Details?

An author’s assertion, or thesis, must have supporting details. Supporting details can take the form of data and evidence. A critical reader must evaluate the strength and relevance of the evidence, and make a judgment about its adequacy in supporting the assertion.

Some types of evidence include:

- Personal experience or observation
- Expert opinion (the statements of researchers, professors, government officials, or other experts in their fields)
- Research citation
- Statistical data (facts and figures, etc.)
- Examples, descriptions of particular events, or illustrative situations
- Analogies (comparisons with similar situations, ideas, etc.)
- Historical documentation



Acceptable evidence directly supports an author’s assertion and clearly illustrates the issue in question.

Adapted from McWhorter, Kathleen T. Reading Across the Disciplines. 2nd Ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005.