

READING A TEXTBOOK CHAPTER CRITICALLY:

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

As a student, before you go into a test situation, you always ask your instructor questions to find out what the test will cover, what kind of test it will be, how many questions will be on it, and how many points each will be worth. The information gathered from the answers to those questions helps you to prepare more efficient for the test and receive a higher grade for your efforts.

The importance of asking questions also applies to reading. Furthermore, questions are used to gather information for overviewing and previewing purposes. Questioning has a very important role to play when it comes to dealing with textbooks and other kinds of reading as well.

How, then, do you actually apply **critical reading** to a text book chapter? As you may have guessed, it involves the use of questions. When we discussed overviewing and previewing, we emphasized the importance of major and minor chapter headings because they make you aware of the topics covered and how the topics are related. Headings are generally highlighted in boldface or in colored type to stress their importance to the reader. *By simply turning those headings into questions, you are focusing your attention on the most important information in a textbook chapter and evaluating that information to answer your questions.* Sometimes writers actually provide headings that are already in question form, which makes your job even easier. Nevertheless, when you have

to make headings into questions yourself, you can do so through the use of words often found in questions, such as *who*, *when*, *what*, *where*, *how* and *why*. For example, look at the following headings and their corresponding questions.

Heading	Question
Booker T. Washington	Who was Booker T. Washington?
The Best Time to Study	When is the best time to study?
Physical Needs	What are physical needs?
The Cradle of Civilization	Where was the cradle of civilization?
Preventing Accidents	How do you prevent accidents?
The Need for Love	Why do we need love?

Sometimes it is very important to develop a question that relates a minor heading to a major one in order to understand how they are connected or related to each other. For instance, if the minor heading “Genetic Factors” is found under the major heading “The Development of Emotions” in a given chapter, then an appropriate question would read something like “What are the genetic factors, and how do they contribute to the development of emotions?” By asking a question like this, you are focusing not only on the meaning of genetic factors but also on their relationship to the development of emotions. Certainly, that is what the textbook writer wants you to do.

When answering the questions that you have developed, you should always look for the central message of each chapter section and be aware of main ideas, patterns or organization, and context definitions; they provide the information with which to answer your questions. It is a very good idea to

underline or highlight with a marker the information contained in main ideas, patterns or organization, and context definitions to separate it from the other material.

Underlining or highlighting is a useful technique that contributes to better comprehension because it requires that you evaluate carefully when deciding what information needs to be separated from the rest. That makes you into a more active, attentive reader, which is also an aid to concentration. Finally, this skill makes it easier to review the important information that you have separated in each section of a chapter without having to go back to reread everything. In short, underlining, highlighting, marking up, and even writing in your textbooks will help you master them by making you into a much more involved reader.

Adapted from *Critical Reading, Critical Thinking*, Richard Pirozzi, Longman