

Lesson 15: Reading Comprehension—Part 2

Reading Critically

Critical reading is another important textbook reading skill. *Critical reading* is reading to evaluate. A critical reader compares what the textbook says with what he or she has learned from experience or other reading. He or she is willing to challenge the author's ideas, especially if they disagree with the Bible or biblical principles. Five critical reading skills are important when reading textbooks.

1. Judging the qualifications of the author.
2. Determining the accuracy of the information.
3. Separating fact from opinion.
4. Determining true and false statements.
5. Detecting propaganda or bias.

Judging an Author's Qualifications

When determining if the author is qualified to write a textbook, you must evaluate the background, education, and experience of the author. You also need to determine if the author is biased for or against the Bible.

Determining the Accuracy of the Information

In addition to evaluating whether an author is qualified, a critical reader must also evaluate the accuracy and value of the source itself. The copyright date is valuable in determining if the textbook is current. An out-of-date textbook can have limited or no value if the topic changes rapidly. For example, science, government, and computer textbooks can be out of date in some areas before they are printed. A critical reader is aware that new information may change some information in a textbook, even if the author tries to be accurate.

Be a Critical Reader

1. Could the story have really happened?
2. Is the author qualified?
3. What is true in the story?
4. What is fiction in the story?
5. Which statements are fact? Which are opinion?
6. Is the information current?
7. What are the exaggerations in the passage?
8. What are the author's beliefs?
9. How does the author try to influence you?
10. What biblical principles are involved in the story or passage?

Determining True and False Statements

It takes experience to learn how to determine if a statement is true or false. If you have taken true/false tests, you have practiced this skill. Readers can misread textbooks because they fail to identify qualifiers. This is why it is important to look for *qualifiers*—words such as *all*, *none*, *most*, *never*, *many*, *always*, and *usually*—in your reading that make a statement true or false. Sometimes non-Christian writers purposely mislead readers.

Read statements carefully to determine if they are true. If any part of a statement is false, the entire statement is false and any information based on the false statement would also be false. If any part of a textbook presents error as truth, the entire textbook is suspect.

Detecting Propaganda or Bias

A great advantage of Christian textbooks is that the authors do *not* disagree with the Bible or try intentionally to teach error. However, all textbooks reflect the beliefs and biases of the authors. A writer is biased when he or she bases conclusions on preconceived ideas rather than on evidence. A critical reader detects beliefs and biases in textbook material.

Propaganda is the use of language to sway or influence people's opinions. Propaganda is *not* always bad; however, when a writer tries to persuade you to believe or do something, you should be aware that he or she may be using propaganda techniques. A danger of propaganda is that readers can be influenced without knowing it's taking place.



Part 1—Directions: Use the textbook your teacher assigns to answer the following questions.

1. Who is the author(s)? _____
2. What is the author's educational, professional, or experiential background? _____

Does this qualify the author to write this book? ____ Why or why not? _____

3. Are there any reasons the author might be biased or prejudiced in his opinion? _____

What are they? _____

4. Do you think the author(s) is a Christian? ____ Why or why not? _____

Separating Fact from Opinion

A *fact* is a statement that can be proved true. An *opinion* is a statement that cannot be proved true or false. Sometimes authors present their opinions as fact. Sometimes readers fail to comprehend that a statement is only an opinion; they read it as a fact even if the author admits that it is his opinion. As you read, look for evidence to back up the author's claim. For example, did the author see or hear this happen? Always remember, if the Bible says something is true, accept it as truth, regardless of anyone's opinion.

“God said it, I believe it, and that settles it for me!”

—Old hymn