

ically every day as you figure out why things happen to you or what your experiences mean. This chapter introduces more formal methods for reading and writing critically.

### 10a Using techniques of critical reading

In college much of your critical thinking will focus on written texts (a short story, a journal article, a blog) or on visual or multimedia texts (a photograph, an advertisement, a film). Like all subjects worthy of critical consideration, such works operate on at least three levels:

1. What the creator actually says or shows.
2. What the creator does not say or show but builds into the work, intentionally or not.
3. What you think in response.

Discovering each level of the work involves a number of reading techniques that are discussed in this chapter.



The idea of reading critically may require you to make some adjustments if readers in your native culture tend to seek understanding or agreement more than engagement from what they read. Readers of English use texts for all kinds of reasons, including pleasure, reinforcement, and information. But they also read questioningly, to uncover the author's motives (What are this author's biases?), test their own ideas (Can I support my point of view as well as this author supports hers?), and arrive at new knowledge (Why is the author's evidence so persuasive?).

### 1 Previewing the material

When you're reading a work of literature, such as a short story or a poem, it's often best just to plunge right in. But for critical reading of other works, it's worthwhile to skim before reading word for word, forming expectations and even some preliminary questions. The preview will make your reading more informed and fruitful.

- **Gauge length and level.** Is the material brief and straightforward so that you can read it in one sitting, or will it require more time?
- **Check the facts of publication.** Does the date of publication suggest currency or datedness? Does the publisher or publication specialize in scholarly articles, popular books, or something else? For a Web publication, who or what sponsors the site—an individual? a nonprofit organization? a government body? a college or university?
- **Look for content cues.** What do the title, introduction, headings, illustrations, conclusion, and other features tell you about the topic, the author's approach, and the main ideas?
- **Learn about the author.** Does a biography tell you about the

4 Sentence Parts and Patterns

3 Clarity and Style

6 Spelling and Mechanics

5 Punctuation