

## What is Close and Critical Reading?

*Close and critical reading is the ability to comprehend information, analyze how it is presented, determine the purpose and perspective of the author, establish what it means, and apply it to your life.*

*-Dr. Elaine Weber*

The following four questions are used to move students from comprehending the information to the final application to their own lives. These four steps or modes of analysis are reflected in four types of reading and discussion:

- What a text says – restatement
- What a text does – description
- What a text means – interpretation
- So what does it mean to me – application

**You can distinguish each mode of analysis by the subject matter of the discussion:**

- What a text says – restatement – talks about the same topic as the original (summary or restatement)
- What a text does – description – discusses aspects of the presentation of the text (choices of content, language, and structure)
- What a text means – interpretation — analyzes the text and asserts a meaning for the text as a whole (putting the message in a larger context and determine theme)
- So what does it mean to me – application of the text to my life (finding the relevance of the bigger meaning/ theme to my life)

**The Tools of Critical Reading: analysis and inference**

1. What to look for (**analysis**) - involves recognizing those aspects of a discussion that control the meaning.
2. How to think about what you find (**inference**) - involves the processes of inference, the interpretation of data from within the text.

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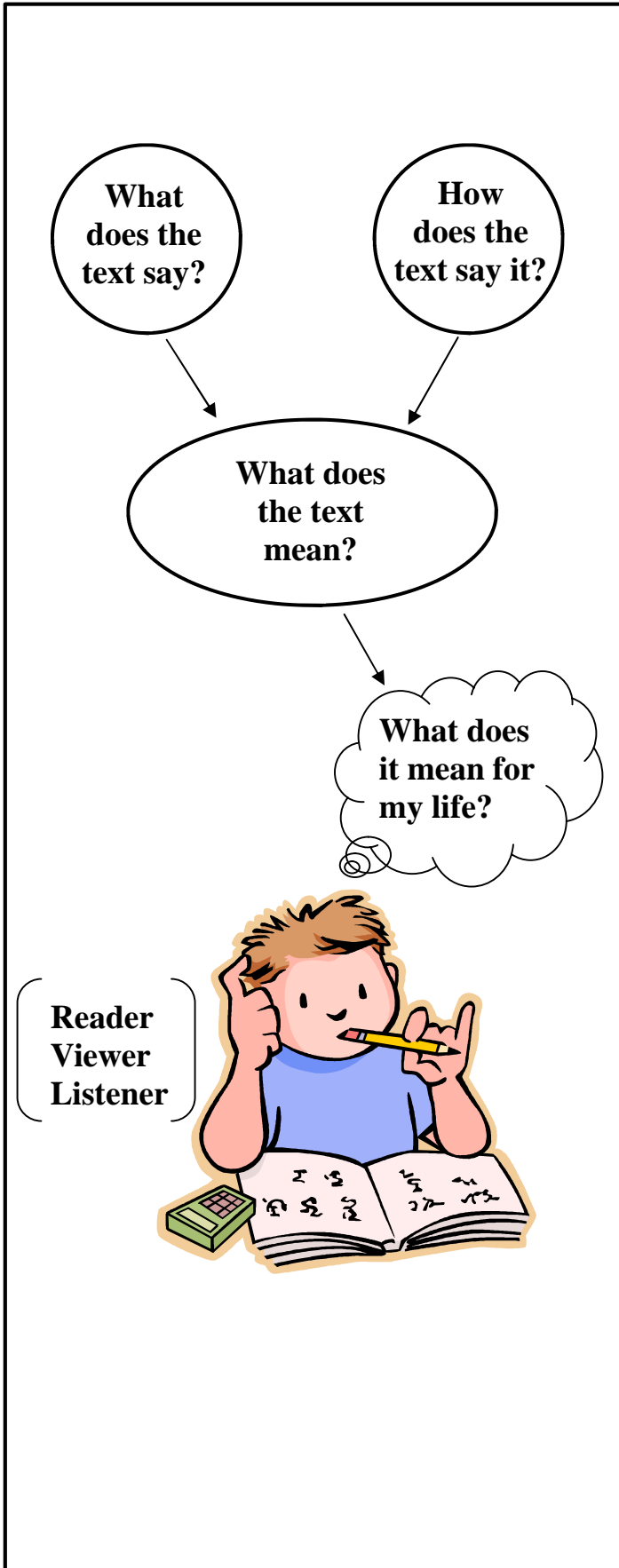
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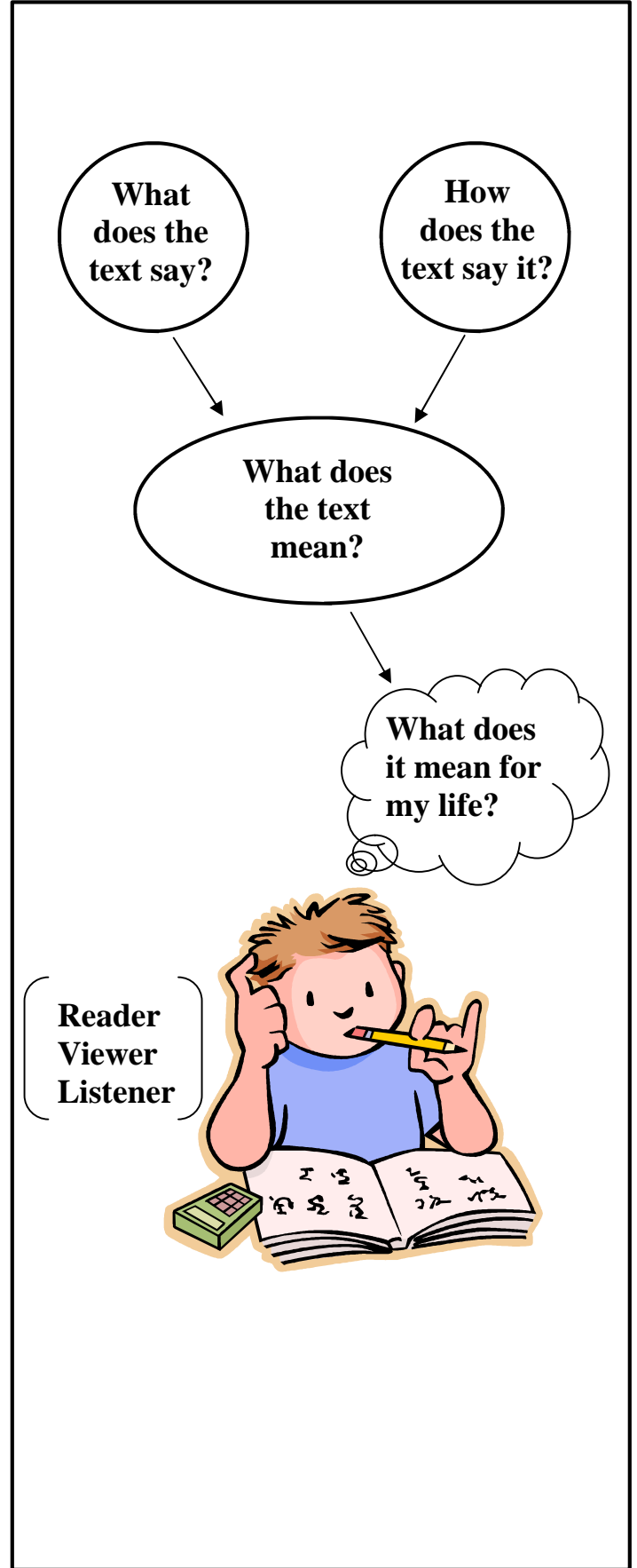
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## Question #1 What does the text say?

### Reading What a Text Says: Restatement

The process of reading what a text says is concerned with basic comprehension by simply following the thought of a discussion. The focus is on understanding each sentence, sentence by sentence, and on following the thought from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. There is no attempt to assess the nature of the discussion and no concern for an overall motive or intent. Restatement generally takes the form of a summary, paraphrase, or précis.

Restatements should avoid the same language as much as possible to avoid plagiarism and to show understanding. Reading what a text says is common under a variety of circumstances:

- when learning the definitions and concepts of a new discipline,
- when there is agreement on the facts of a situation and their interpretation,
- when a text is taken to offer a complete and objective presentation, or when the word of a specific author or source is accepted as authoritative.

Answering this first question assumes that students can decode the words and read fluently enough to replicate the meaning intended by the author. To support the reading development of students who cannot decode or read fluently or comprehend sufficiently go to [www.misionliteracy.com](http://www.misionliteracy.com) Reading Comprehension and find the appropriate assessments and interventions.

Summary means a short version containing the gist of something: a shortened version of something that has been said or written, containing only the main points. To read for summary, students need to have developed the following comprehension skills: determining important ideas, visualizing, synthesizing, fixing-up strategies, and asking questions. They need to know how to use the ideas with using the same language (paraphrasing and using synonyms).

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## Question #1 Restatement

### Summarizing Activities

1. Circle the most important word or phrase in the sentence, paragraph or text.
2. Underline the most important things told about a word or phrase.
3. One-syllable word summary  
Have students working in groups of three or four students, develop a one-syllable word summary of the article. Students may use only words of one syllable. This is a fun activity and encourages the use of synonyms.

### Highlighted Reading for Middle and High School by Dr. Elaine Weber

#### **Purpose:**

Engage students in print  
Develop fluent scanning  
Highlight most important information  
Prepare text for substantive conversation

#### **Materials:**

A copy of the text  
A highlighter pen

#### **Planning:**

Select an article or piece of text that is accessible to all the students.  
Identify the vocabulary that needs to be taught in advance.  
Determine a context for the information that could frame it for the students' prior knowledge.  
Consider what kind of discussion you want to come out of the reading of the text.  
Select the appropriate information to be highlighted based on the goal for the discussion.  
Map out the text paragraph by paragraph with prompts to highlight the information.

#### **Procedure:**

Build the context for the reading by activating prior knowledge. Have students find the vocabulary in the text and highlight it as you give the definition.  
Move the students to scan the text by telling them which paragraph and what to highlight. (Like finding Waldo)

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## Question #2

### How does the text say it?

#### Describing What a Text Does: Description

This second level of reading is to recognize the structure and function of the discussion. The text is examined to determine what a text does to convey ideas. The text is analyzed for structure, organization, genre, purpose and perspective. The following talks about the "what" of the text:

- what topics are discussed?
- what examples and evidence are used?
- what conclusions are reached?
- what is the purpose?
- what is the perspective?

This level of reading looks at broad portions of the text to identify the structure of the discussion as a whole. On completion, the critical reader can repeat what the text says, and also describe what the text does. Specifically they can identify how evidence is used and how the final points are reached. They look for a topic to be addressed in terms that are clearly defined with evidence presented. Common knowledge must be accounted for, exceptions must be explained, causes must be shown to precede effects and to be capable of the effect, and conclusions must be shown to follow logically from earlier arguments and evidence. Only once the purpose and perspective are determined and that a text is consistent and coherent can it be decided whether or not to accept the assertions and conclusions.

Included in the structure is a description of how the author(s) crafts the text using voice, dialogue, language, figures of speech, imagery, mood, tone and etc.

When literature is analyzed it explains what a work of literature means, and how it means it; it is essentially an articulation of and a defense of an interpretation which shows how the resources of literature are used to create the meaningfulness of the text. There are several main reasons for analyzing literature:

1. to obtain a deeper understanding and a fuller appreciation of the literature
2. to lead to a more astute and powerful use of the tools of meaning on the reader's part
3. to be aware of the cultural delineations of a work, its ideological aspects
4. To understand the way ideas and feelings are talked about in our culture or in other times and cultures

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## Question #2 Description

### Questions to analyze structure and function of the text

- How is the information organized (e.g. by topic, in time, by contrasting ideas)?
- What genre does the selection represent?
- What is the purpose of the text?
- What are the ends and objectives
- Is the Source Relevant?
- Is the Source Credible?
- Is the Source Current?
- From what point of view was this written?
- Whose perspective is found in this text?
- What is the author's stance or perspective towards this topic?
- Who or what is not represented?

### Questions to Analyze Author's Craft

- Who was the voice the author chose as narrator: first person, third person, a storyteller, an anonymous voice, a different voice, or the author as self?
- What are some interesting words, phrases, and sentences?
- Were words used to create a feeling or picture in your mind?
- Was any of the language especially interesting, vivid or surprising?
- Was the dialogue realistic? Could you hear people in life saying those words?
- What did you notice about the style of the writing?
- How did the text begin: with a question, dialogue, a shocking statement, one word?
- Were there examples of slang, different spellings, or strange words or expressions?
- What is the mood and tone?
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## Question #3

### What does the text mean?

#### Analyzing What a Text Means: Interpretation

This final level of reading infers an overall meaning of the text. Features are examined that run throughout the text to see how the discussion shapes perceptions of reality. Meaning is derived from the examination of what the text says, how content and language shape the portrayal of the topic, and how relationships between those patterns convey underlying meaning. When reading expository text that presents **an argument**, the following questions should be used for critical reading. Evaluating an argument means testing the logic of a text as well as its credibility and emotional impact. All writers make assertions that want you to accept as true.

- As a critical reader, you should not accept anything on face value but to recognize every assertion as an argument that must be carefully evaluated.
- An argument has two essential parts: a claim and support.
- The claim asserts a conclusion -- an idea, an opinion, a judgment, or a point of view - that the writer wants you to accept.
- The support includes reasons (shared beliefs, assumptions, and values) and evidence (facts, examples, statistics, and authorities) that give readers the basis for accepting the conclusion.
- When you assess an argument, you are concerned with the process of reasoning as well as its truthfulness (these are not the same thing).
- At the most basic level, in order for an argument to be acceptable, the support must be appropriate to the claim and the statements must be consistent with one another.

#### Finding the Thesis or Theme

Both of these terms concern the overall message of a book. The main difference is that "thesis" is generally used when referring to nonfiction works while a "theme" is used when referring to a literary work (fiction).

- The thesis of a nonfiction piece is the argument the writer is making. It is often stated clearly in a single sentence within the first few paragraphs of an article. With a little practice, the thesis is easy to locate.
- Fiction is not so easy to find. Literature is an art, and the beauty of art is that it can be interpreted differently by everyone. The message of a fiction book is much like the message of a beautiful painting. It is not something that is stated in a particular sentence and easily located; it is something that is comprehended upon reflection.

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### Question #3 Interpretation

Considering the meaning of the text, the reader should ask the following questions appropriate for the text

- What does the author hope to gain from taking this position?
- How does the author's position stand up in comparison to other positions on the issue?
- Whose voices are missing, silenced, or discounted?
- How might alternative perspectives or viewpoints be represented?
- What does the author want the reader to believe
- What are the sources of information and fact?
- What is the author's background and experience?
- Is there enough evidence to support the point the author is trying to make?
- Does the evidence relate to the main point in a logical way? In other words, does the evidence work to prove the point, or does it contradict the point, or show itself to be irrelevant to the point the author is trying to make
- What is the method and quality of information collected?
- What are the concepts that make the reasoning possible?
- What are the assumptions that underlie the concepts in use?
- What are the implications that follow from their use?
- What does the author, filmmaker, or artist want you to think?
- What is the world like to people in this text?
- Were things left out of the illustrations that you thought needed to be included?
- What might you add to the story to make it more complete?
- What do other sources of information say about these events, characters, and issues?
- Is the information accurate and believable?
- What kind of research went into writing this book?
- What has the author said that makes you question the accuracy of the information?
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## Question #4 So What?

### Making Connections to Me and My World: Relevancy

- What does this mean to me and my world?
- What should/could I do to act upon this?
- How does it affect my life?
- What significance does it have for my life or the lives of others?

#### Text-to-self:

- What does this remind me of in my life?
- What is this similar to in my life?
- How is this different from my life?
- Has something like this ever happened to me?
- How does this relate to my life?
- What were my feelings when I read this?

#### Text-to-text:

- What does this remind me of in another book I've read?
- How is this text similar to other things I've read?
- How is this different from other books I've read?
- Have I read about something like this before?

#### Text-to-world:

- What does this remind me of in the real world?
- How is this text similar to things that happen in the real world?
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- How did that part relate to the world around me?

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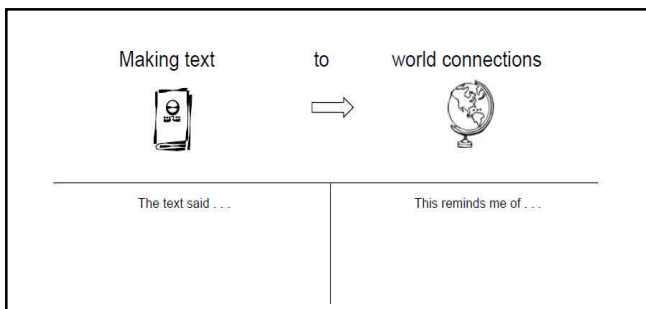
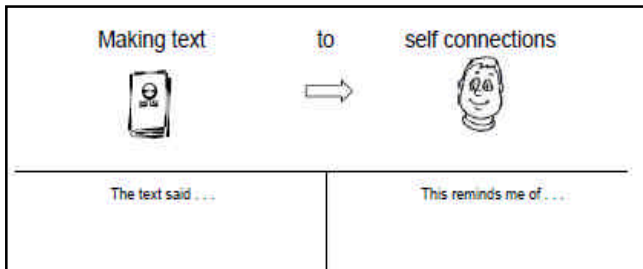
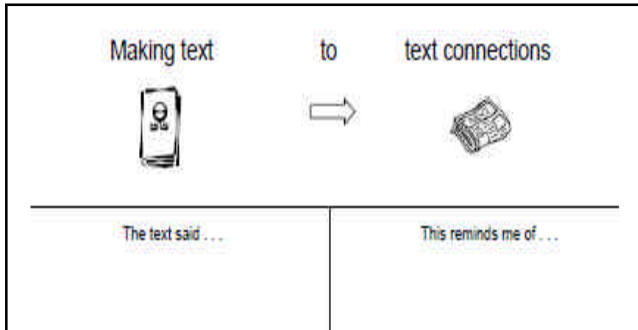
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### Strategies

The link below provides a wealth of resources and graphic organizers to support students in finding relevancy with text.

[http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/graphic\\_organizers.htm](http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/graphic_organizers.htm)



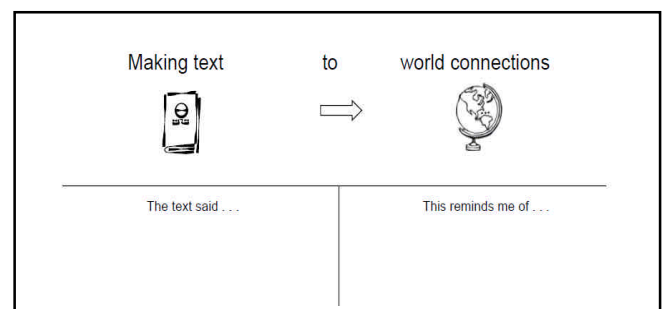
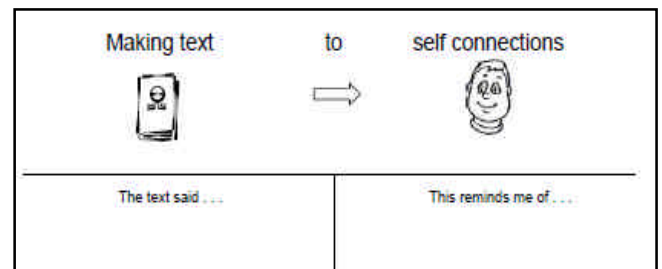
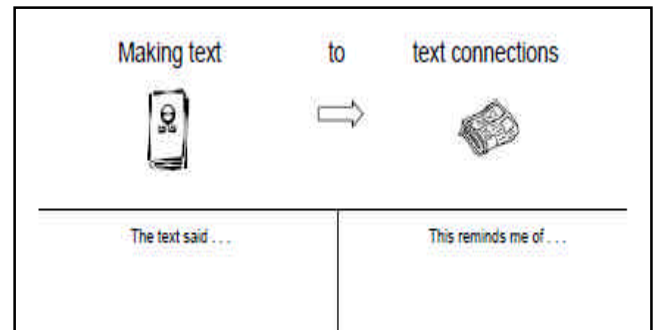
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