

**Course Topic: Teaching Reading, Teaching English for Academic Purposes****Course Instructor**

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**Course Synopsis**

Higher level students, particularly those who are looking to move into higher education studies at an English-speaking university, need to learn to read critically. Reading critically means not just understanding the words in the text but also being able to ‘read between the lines’ for other layers of meaning presented by the author.

**Course Agenda**

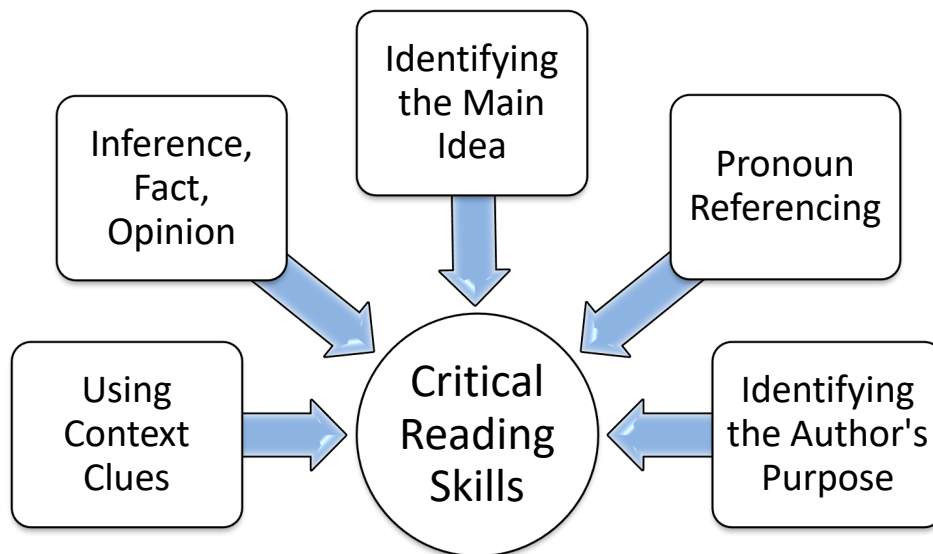
1. Surface versus Deep Reading
2. Critical Reading Skills
3. Using Context Clues
4. Inference, Fact, Opinion
5. Identifying the Main Idea
6. Pronoun Referencing
7. Identifying the Writer’s Purpose

### 1. Surface versus Deep Reading

Characteristics of a <i>Surface</i> Approach to Reading	Characteristics of a <i>Deep</i> Approach to Reading
<p>The student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intends to complete task requirements.</li> <li>• Memorizes the information needed for assignments.</li> <li>• Fails to distinguish principles from examples.</li> <li>• Focuses on discrete elements without synthesizing them.</li> <li>• Does not reflect on the writer’s purpose.</li> </ul>	<p>The student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intends to understand.</li> <li>• Interacts actively with the content.</li> <li>• Relates new ideas to previous experience.</li> <li>• Links concepts to everyday experiences.</li> <li>• Connects evidence to make conclusions.</li> <li>• Analyzes the logic of the main argument.</li> </ul>

### 2. Critical Reading Skills

Critical reading skills allow students to attack a piece of reading with a critical or evaluative eye. Within the overall concept of critical reading skills, there are important subskills to be aware of. These are:



### 3. Using Context Clues

**Context Clues** are hints that the author gives to help define a difficult or unusual word. The clue may appear within the same sentence as the word to which it refers, or it may be in a sentence before or after the sentence with the word. Because most of our vocabulary is gained through reading, it is important that we are able to recognize and take advantage of context clues.

There are at least five kinds of context clues that are quite common.

**Synonym** A word with the same meaning as the unknown word is used in the sentence.

*My daughter has been struggling in math, so I got her a **tutor**, or a private teacher.*

**Antonym** A word or group of words that has the opposite meaning is used to reveal the meaning of an unknown word.

*Although some people are **churlish**, others are polite, cheerful and absolutely well-mannered.*

**Explanation** The unknown word is explained within the sentence or in a sentence immediately before or after.

*She was so **frugal** that she refused to give her own sons the money they needed to buy school supplies. It truly upset her to give up any of her money.*

**Example** Specific examples are used to define the term.

*His **stamina** is one of the reasons why he is very successful. He is able to work long hours with little rest.*

**Punctuation** This is also a form of context clue. Not only are commas (,) used, but also dashes (-), semi colons (;), colons (:) and parentheses ().

*He believes that the world population will **stabilize** (reach its top point and then stay at that point) at 8-10 billion people.*

Use the activity on the following page to help your students practice identifying and using context clues.

### Context Clues Activity

Without relying on a dictionary, use your knowledge of the five types of context clues from previous examples to help you guess the meanings of the highlighted words below. For each word, also indicate the clues in the sentence that helped you to guess the meaning.

**A. Synonyms:**

The artist was very careful and exact as he *meticulously* painted the portrait.

Meticulously =

Clue =

**B. Antonyms:**

Unlike his brother who is truly handsome, Frank is rather *homely*.

Homely =

Clue =

**C. Explanation:**

Luckily, Alan had a very *frugal* wife who used discount coupons from the newspaper, always compared prices before buying anything, and spent only when necessary.

Frugal =

Clue =

**D. Example:**

Our uncle was a *drifter*, an incurable wanderer who never could stay in one place.

Drifter =

Clue =

**E. Punctuation:**

The Asian *gibbon* – like other apes – is especially adapted for life in trees.

Gibbon =

Clue =

#### 4. Inference/Fact/Opinion

**An inference** is when a reader decides that something is probably true because of other information that he/she already has; the reader makes a logical conclusion based on the information.

Example 1: Susan had difficulty with her last patient of the day. The patient was complaining of sore muscles, so Susan said she could give him Ibuprofen. The patient was not happy with this because he wanted Susan to fix his pain right away.

A. What is Susan? \_\_\_\_\_

B. What are the clues (words) that helped you infer (make a logical conclusion) about Susan?

Example 2: I went out into my garden one spring and I found it. It was really weak and hardly breathing so I called the vet and he told me what to feed it, which I did. Several weeks later, it got stronger and stronger and it started to hop around. One day, when I left my window open accidentally, it hopped out of the window and left. I never saw it again.

A. What is "it"? \_\_\_\_\_

B. What are the clues (words) that helped you infer (make a logical conclusion) about "it"?

The ability to make inferences is very important in critical reading. We often need to infer the topic or main idea of a text, the author's opinion, or other information.

When reading critically, it is also important to recognize the difference between facts and non-facts (opinions and inferences).

**A fact** is a statement that is true and can be objectively proven.

**An opinion** is a belief or judgement that a person makes that is supported with an argument. An opinion cannot be proven true or false.

**Non-facts** include both opinions and inferences.

Remember that it can often be very hard to tell if a statement is a fact or an opinion. Opinion is the same as belief. People do not always have the same beliefs, or opinions, but reasonable people all know that a fact is a certainty.

On the following page, you will find a sample activity that you can use with your students to help them work on identifying facts, inferences and opinions.

Inference/Fact/Opinion Activity

#1: For each of the following sentences, decide if it is a fact or an opinion.

	Fact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Opinion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
a. Water boils at 100 degrees Celsius.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. People should always be kind to each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Ice cream tastes good.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. My friend has 6 fingers on one hand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. That boy is the nicest person in the school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#2: Read the following passages and decide if the statements following each passage are facts, opinions or inferences.

1. An old proverb says that: "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." Like many fruits, apples contain Vitamin C as well as a host of other antioxidant compounds, which may reduce the risk of cancer by preventing DNA damage. The fibre content, while less than in most other fruits, helps regulate bowel movements and may thus reduce the risk of colon cancer. Apples may also help with heart disease, weight loss and controlling cholesterol, as they do not have any cholesterol, have fibre (which reduces cholesterol by preventing re-absorption), and are bulky for their caloric content like most fruits and vegetables.

	Fact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Opinion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Inference <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
a. Apples contain vitamin C.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Apples are healthy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. People should eat apples every day.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. A dog is a suitable pet for many families. Because there are numerous breeds of varying sizes and personalities, there are dogs that will happily fit into a variety of environments and lifestyles. However, a dog is an expensive and long term commitment and is therefore not a pet that a child can be expected to be solely responsible for. The type of dog suitable for a particular adult or family will vary. Some breeds require more space, exercise and care than others. The size and characteristics of the dog will also have a bearing on suitability for the environment that it is to live in. It is important to consider other pets in the household and all family members. Some dogs may not take well to small children pulling them about while others have a high tolerance for such things, so they are more suited to a family with small children. It is important that the temperament of the dog and characteristics of the breed are considered very carefully when choosing a dog.

	Fact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Opinion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Inference <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
a. Small children need adults to help them care for a dog.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. A small dog is a good pet for a child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

c. There are many breeds of dogs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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## 5. Identifying the Main Idea

**The main idea** of a paragraph is the most important point of a paragraph (minus all of the details). This point is supported by most of the sentences in the paragraph.

Usually, the main idea is the first sentence of a paragraph. If it isn't the first sentence, it may be found in the last sentence or in the middle of the paragraph. Sometimes, a writer may not directly state the main idea. When this happens, you have to read the entire paragraph to identify it. How do you help yourself identify the main idea in this situation? First, you need to ask yourself the question "What is the most important point the writer is trying to make about the topic?" Secondly, you should look for ideas and words that are repeated or emphasized more than once in the passage. Finally, you can use your information from the first two steps to formulate a main idea for the paragraph.

On the following page, you will find a sample activity that you can use with your students to help them work on identifying the main idea of a paragraph.



## Identifying the Main Idea Activity

Identify the main idea of the following paragraphs and note down what evidence helped you to draw this conclusion.

A. The majority of teenagers have no idea what it is that they want to do for the rest of their lives. It is a very big decision. There are, however, a number of things that young people can do to help them narrow their choices. First, students can talk to guidance counsellors at school and take an interest test to help them see what kinds of jobs match their interests. Second, they can do some research on their own about careers that interest them. They can also volunteer in a field that they are curious about. Another step that a young person can take to help them choose a future job is to 'job-shadow', where they spend a day with a person who is working in a field that interests them. These are just a few helpful ideas for teenagers as they begin to choose a career.

**What is the main idea of paragraph A?**

**What evidence do you have?**

B. Canadians love their coffee. Because of this, a real variety of shops has come about specializing in all kinds of coffee. In fact, Tim Horton's is the king of these coffee shops. Chances are, no matter where you live in Canada, you can find a Tim's near you. There are even Tim Hortons coffee shops in the United States now. For a few years, Tim's has been part of many gas stations. This allows you to fill up with gas as well as fill up on your favourite coffee at the same time. How great is that?

**What is the main idea of paragraph B?**

**What evidence do you have?**

C. Zoos negatively affect the behaviour of their animals. Caged animals feel stress because they have few activities to do. In natural environments, animals enjoy their lives because they can interact with other animals, but zoo animals cannot do this in a controlled environment, which then becomes stressful. They have few chances to run, fly in the sky, swing through trees or wander over long distances; as a result, they pace back and forth, which is a sign of boredom or stress. Moreover, animals in enclosures cannot behave instinctually. In fact, they do not need to use their intelligence or skills to survive, so they might become lazy. Since nothing really changes in a pen, the animals do not have to look for a mate, food or shelter; therefore, they might develop other abnormal behaviours, such as hurting themselves.

**What is the main idea of paragraph C?**

**What evidence do you have?**

D. Europeans - the Dutch and the Portuguese - were the first to bring tea to Europe in the early 17th century. Their ships carried silks, spices and tea from the Far East. Soon, tea became very popular with the British and the Russians. The Russians traded furs for tea, and in 1796, they were drinking 1,500,000 kilograms of tea a year. Tea arrived in Britain in 1658, and it was very expensive because King Charles II taxed it heavily. Despite the taxes, the British could not get enough tea and by 1791 were consuming eight million kilograms a year. Consequently, the British traded opium for tea in order to keep up with domestic demand. Because of the Opium Wars, the tea supply from China was cut off. As a result, Britain turned to its colonies of North India and present day Sri Lanka to grow tea.

**What is the main idea of paragraph D?**

**What evidence do you have?**

## 6. Pronoun Referencing

A **pronoun** is a word that is used to substitute for a noun. The word it replaces is called its **antecedent**. Each pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number, person and gender. **Pronoun referencing** is matching the pronoun with its correct antecedent. It is easy to make a careless error in matching antecedents and pronouns. Understanding how pronouns are used and identifying their correct references will better help you understand what you are reading.

Pronouns and antecedents can also cause problems if they are placed too far away from each other in the sentence or paragraph. Usually the pronoun and its antecedent are placed close together.

*Sally left her office at 5:00.*

'Sally' and 'her' are singular, third person, feminine. They agree in number, person and gender. Sometimes the pronouns and antecedents appear in the same sentence and sometimes in different sentences. Look at this example:

*Sally Chan moved to Montreal in 2007. She grew up in Calgary.*

If there is a lot of distance between the antecedent and the pronoun, it can be confusing for the reader and it may be unclear which antecedent the pronoun is referring to.

*Sally Chan moved to Montreal in 2007. So did Mary Smith. She grew up in Calgary.*

In this example, the reader doesn't know whether "she" is referring to the antecedent, Sally Chan, or the antecedent, Mary Smith.

On the following page, you will find a sample activity that you can use with your students to help them work on pronoun referencing.

### Pronoun Referencing Activity

#### A. Finding Pronouns and Antecedents.

For each of the following, circle the pronoun and underline its antecedent.

1. Sally is an actor. She is currently starring in a play called Reason.
2. Sally's character, Joyce, is in love with Brad. Brad is an important character in the story because he represents Reason.
3. Sally really enjoys the role of Joyce as she symbolizes divine love, faith and the importance of hope.
4. Sally has been influenced greatly by the great stage actress, Lorna Taylor, although she has met her only once.
5. Sally moved to Montreal because she thinks it is the centre of Canadian culture.

#### B. Choosing the Correct Pronoun.

For each of the following, circle the pronoun that agrees in number with its antecedent.

1. Each of the girls makes (her, their) own clothes.
2. The jury finally made (its, their) decision.
3. It often seems that television programmers are not concerned with (its, their) viewers.
4. Both Tim and Tony write (his, their) mothers twice a week from camp.
5. Either of the two boys will offer (his, their) help.
6. Does everyone have (his or her, their) textbook?

**C. Choosing Incorrect Pronoun Reference.**

Read the following paragraph carefully. Correct any errors in pronoun reference by striking out the pronouns that do not agree with their antecedents and writing in the correct pronouns above them.

(1) Perhaps because their country has a relatively short history, Canadians are fascinated by its nation's past and their own. (2) Canada, the land of the immigrants, has become Canada, the land of multiculturalism. (3) Canadians' fascination with his past takes many forms. (4) First, Canadians eagerly search the Internet looking for information on their ancestors' lives. (5) A family tree is often constructed to trace its heritage from the 'old country' to the present. (6) Second, the increasing memberships in ethnic and social organizations signal a renewed interest in the past. (7) Many young Canadians enjoy traditional dancing and learning the language of her ancestors. (8) Many people visit historical museums each year to learn about Canada's past. (9) Also, ethnic festivals draw large crowds to their celebration of native foods and cultures. (10) In the past, new Canadian citizens cast off the cultures and traditions of his 'old countries' and instead were quickly assimilated into the mainstream of Canadian society. (11) Today, however, each of us is quick to describe their family's lineage and residence in Canada.

## 7. Identifying the Writer's Purpose

An important question that readers must ask themselves is “Why did the author write this article?” To have a deeper understanding of what is being read, it is necessary to identify the author's purpose for writing because people write for several different reasons. Most writing is intended to **entertain**, to **persuade** or to **inform**. Once a critical reader has identified the author's reasons for writing the text, he/she can adjust his/her reading method to match the writer's purpose and thus analyze information more effectively. Knowing the author's purpose might also help the reader adjust their reading speed. For example, an informational article might require the reader to slow down to fully understand the ideas being presented.

How can you, as a reader, decide what the writer's purpose is? If you enjoyed what you read, one of the writer's purposes could have been **to entertain**. If you found that your opinion has changed about a topic or issue, then one of the author's purposes might have been **to persuade**. If you found that you have learnt something new, then one of the writer's purposes may have been **to inform**. In some articles, a writer may have more than one purpose. Sometimes, the writer clearly states what his/her purpose is, but other times you must infer the purpose.

On the following page, you will find a sample activity that you can use with your students to help them work on identifying the writer's purpose.

Identifying the Writer’s Purpose Activity

A. Read each of the following passages. In the space provided, write a sentence (in your own words) stating the precise purpose of each passage and provide the evidence that led you to this conclusion.

1. Education in Canada is one of the country’s largest activities. Spending on education represents about 7% of Canada’s GDP (Gross Domestic Product), 8.5% of personal income, \$1,580 per capita of population, and \$3,090 per capita of labour force. Most education revenue comes from government sources with provincial and municipal governments providing the major share. Education is second only to social welfare as a consumer of government budgets.

(Source: Canada: a portrait: The official handbook of present conditions and recent progress. 1991. Statistics Canada, pg. 51)

2. One year, Miss Wyatt decided to have a holiday in Italy. She didn’t speak much Italian, but wherever she went, she was fortunate enough to find people who knew enough English to be able to understand what she wanted, until one day when she decided to have lunch in a charming little restaurant in a village in the south of Italy. She had seen some very nice mushrooms in the market of another village near there and thought they would taste very good, so when the waiter came to take her order for lunch, she inquired whether she could have some mushrooms with her meal. She, however, had great difficulty in explaining this to him because she didn’t know the Italian word for mushrooms. At last, she took out a pencil and drew a picture of a mushroom. The waiter’s face brightened at once, and he hastened out to the kitchen. A minute later he returned, carrying an umbrella.

(Source: Hill, L.A. 1977. Advanced stories for reproduction. Tokyo: Oxford University Press, Pg. 34)

3. First, it whipped the Blazer in a test of turning stability. Then, it topped the Explorer in a test of braking. Soon thereafter, it beat the Cherokee with its superior fuel economy. Now, the Subaru Outback outshines the competition in yet another arena: luxury. Our new Outback Limited offers all the creature comforts of your finer sports-utilities like soft leather seating, wood-grain patterned trim and alloy wheels. It also offers something our competitors don't: the added luxury of two sunroofs. To learn more about this outstanding All-Wheel Drive vehicle, stop by your nearest Subaru dealer.

(Source: Advertisement in *Canadian Geographic*, March/April 1998, Vol. 118, No. 2, Pg. 75)



**Remember:** a deep approach to reading allows our students to uncover the layers of meaning that an author has put into his or her work. Our goal, as teachers, is to help our students master critical reading skills so that they will be able to take a deep approach to reading any text.

Thanks for participating!

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