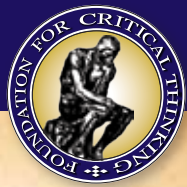


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*How to Assess
Close Reading
and
Substantive
Writing*

The International
CRITICAL
THINKING
READING &
WRITING TEST

Richard Paul &
Linda Elder

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The International Critical Thinking Reading & Writing Test

Introduction

The International Critical Thinking Reading & Writing Test assesses the ability of students to use reading and writing as tools for acquiring knowledge. To appreciate the significance of this test, it is important to understand the integral relationship between reading, writing, and learning.

Reading, Writing and the Educated Mind

Educated persons routinely read closely and write substantively—to learn new ideas, to deepen their understanding of ideas, and to correct conceptual misunderstandings.

To read closely is to construct accurately the meaning of the texts one reads. It involves constructing the thinking of an author in one's own mind, in such a way that were the author to hear the summary, he or she would say, "Excellent, you understand exactly what I was saying!"

Educated persons realize that many of the most important ideas and insights are to be found only in written publications. They also realize that there is a significant difference between reading closely (and hence being able to say accurately and precisely what is said in a text) and reading superficially (and hence being able merely to express a vague, and often erroneous, facsimile of what is said in a text).

To write substantively is to say something worth saying about something worth saying something about. It involves the ability to identify important ideas and express significant implications of those ideas in clear and precise writing.

Educated persons understand the important difference between writing that is merely fluent (but says nothing worth saying) and writing that is substantial (that says something important). They realize, in other words, the difference between "style" and "substance."

To read and write with skill and insight:

1. Students need to understand *how* to read and write well. In other words, they need to understand the *theory* behind close reading and substantive writing. They need to make intuitive in their thinking the conceptual connections behind skilled reading and writing, and then to grasp how skilled reading and writing interrelate.
2. They need practice in close reading and substantive writing. If they are ever to become skilled at reading and writing, students need daily practice, over many years, in disciplined reading and writing. They must develop the habit of reading and writing for deep learning. Through this practice, they come to *learn how to learn*. They gain skills that enable them to continue learning throughout a lifetime.

The Relationship Between Reading and Writing

There is an intimate relationship between reading well and writing well. Any significant deficiency in reading entails a parallel deficiency in writing. Any significant deficiency in writing entails a parallel deficiency in reading.

For example, if students cannot distinguish writing that is clear from writing that is unclear, there will be problems in their reading. They will, for example, mistake vague ideas for clear ones. They will think they understand when they don't. For example, suppose students read the sentence, "Democracy is a form of government in which the people rule." Students skilled in close reading will recognize that they don't really know what this sentence means until they answer the following questions: "Who exactly are *the people*?" and "What exactly is meant by the word *rule*?" In other words, they will recognize the importance of explicating the meaning of the words *people* and *rule*. They will see that understanding these concepts is essential to giving meaning to the sentence.

Similarly, if students cannot detect significant vagueness and ambiguity within texts they read, they will have difficulty formulating significant concepts as they write. In fact, to write substantively students must be able to bring ideas from a text into their thinking, arranging those ideas logically in clear prose style.

In superficial uncritical reading, students soon forget and often distort what they read. In superficial uncritical writing, students often misrepresent what is in the text. Superficial writing does not help students take ownership of the substance they write about. It produces instead an illusion of knowledge. It opens the door for multiple forms of misunderstanding.

Thus, close reading and substantive writing are symbiotic skills of disciplined thought. Both require that we think from multiple perspectives. Both require that we use the elements of reasoning well.¹ In other words, both require the intellectual ability to:

1. **Clarify purposes:** an author's purpose(s) (when we read), and our own purpose(s) (when we write).
2. **Formulate clear questions:** those that an author is asking (as we read) and those we are pursuing (as we write).
3. **Distinguish accurate and relevant information from inaccurate and irrelevant information:** in texts that we read and in preparation for our own writing.
4. **Reach logical inferences or conclusions:** based on what we read, and in preparation for writing.
5. **Identify significant and deep concepts:** those of an author and those we want to guide our thinking while we write.
6. **Distinguish justifiable from unjustifiable assumptions:** that an author is using, or that we are using in our own thinking as we write.
7. **Trace logical implications:** those of an author's thinking, and those that may follow from our written work.

¹ For explication of the elements of reasoning, see: Linda Elder, and Richard Paul. 2003. *A Miniature Guide to the Foundations of Analytic Thinking*. Dillon Beach, California: Foundation for Critical Thinking. www.criticalthinking.org

First Level: Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing the Text Sentence by Sentence

1. State in your own words the meaning of each sentence as you read.

Second Level: Explicating

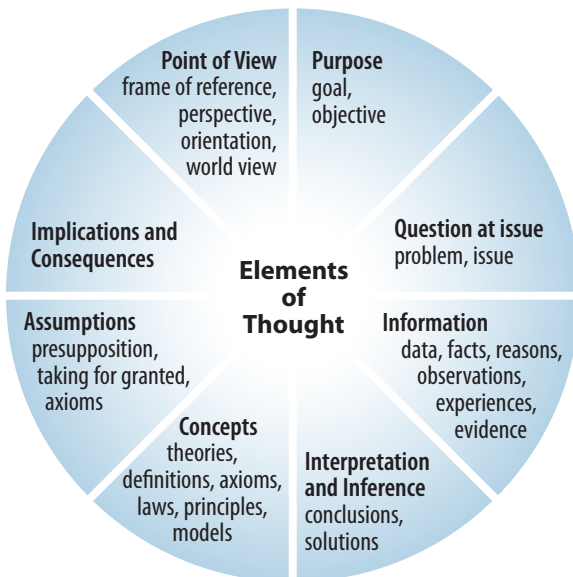
Explicating the Thesis of a Paragraph

1. State the main point of the paragraph in one or two sentences.
2. Then elaborate on what you have paraphrased (“In other words,...”).
3. Give examples of the meaning by tying it to concrete situations in the real world. (For example,...)
4. Generate metaphors, analogies, pictures, or diagrams of the basic thesis to connect it to other meanings you already understand.

Third Level: Analysis

Analyzing the Logic of Text

Anytime you read, you are reading the product of an author’s reasoning. You can use your understanding of the elements of reasoning, therefore, to bring your reading to a higher level. You can do this by writing your answers to the following questions (you may ask these questions in any order you want):



Use the template in Appendix A, *Analyzing the Logic of an Excerpt, Article, Essay, or Chapter*,

and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.

PARAPHRASE:

Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient.

PARAPHRASE:

The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it.

PARAPHRASE:

Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?

PARAPHRASE:

Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience, to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward.

PARAPHRASE:

It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right.

PARAPHRASE:

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go;...If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you can consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil;

PARAPHRASE:

but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine.

PARAPHRASE:

The Declaration of Independence Specimen Answers—Form C

Explicating the Logic of a Text (An analysis of eight basic structures)

1. **The authors' *purpose*:** to enunciate human rights, and their violation, as a justification for the 1776 political revolt of American colonists against Great Britain.
2. **The most important *questions, problems, or issues in the text*:** Are there universal human rights? Under what conditions are people justified in attempting to overthrow a government? Were the colonists justified in their revolt against Great Britain?
3. **The most significant *information or data in the text*:** information supporting the view that American colonists were being denied basic rights, that they were suffering at the hands of the government.
4. **The most basic *conclusions of the author*:** that the proper function of governments is to protect the universal human rights of citizens so they can live the freest life possible; and that if a government fails to protect the human rights of its citizens, the people have the right to overthrow the government.
5. **The most basic *concepts, theories, or ideas used by the author*:** human rights, revolution, and the role and duty of government.
6. **The most fundamental *assumptions of the author*:** that all people have the same basic rights, that all governments have the same basic duties to the people, that governments should serve people rather than people serving governments.
7. **The most significant *implications of the text*:** that of people setting an example to the world by enunciating universal human rights, including, and most important, the right of revolution.
8. **The author's *point of view*:** seeing all humans as equal in worth and in human rights; at the same time, seeing all governments as having the obligation to be subservient to people, rather than to dominate them.

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Dr. Linda Elder is an educational psychologist who has taught both psychology and critical thinking at the college level. She is the President of the Foundation for Critical Thinking and the Executive Director of the Center for Critical Thinking. Dr. Elder has a special interest in the relation of thought and emotion, the cognitive and the affective, and has developed an original theory of the stages of critical thinking development. She has coauthored four books on critical thinking, as well as twenty-one thinkers' guides. She is a dynamic presenter with extensive experience in leading seminars on critical thinking.

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