

## Considering Course Material<sup>1</sup>

What follows is a very general, certainly not complete, guide to how one should consider media material and think for oneself. It should, however, help you as you work with the course material. It also should provide you a basis for your analytical work.

### I. A Guide on How to Analyze a News Article

Analyzing a news article properly is a skill that can be acquired. Reporters are expected to be objective, but their personal opinions and biases often will affect their articles. The prudent reader must learn how to read the material objectively.

Consider the whole article.

- \* Does the headline or title give you an idea of what the article is about or is it misleading?
- \* What is the main point of the story or the thesis of the article?
- \* Does the story develop the main point or does the article effectively support or develop the thesis?
- \* Are there structural guides in the article – the use of subheading, fonts, and font attributes?
- \* Is there an introduction or a conclusion/summary?

Consider some specifics.

- \* Who wrote the article and for what audience?
- \* Check for fact and opinion. A news article should be factual with statistics, proven studies and authorities backing up any conclusion. How does the writer use opinion, emotion or personal **experience in the article**?
- \* Recognize the importance of using reliable sources of information. Be aware of sources which lack a track record of honesty, are not in a position to know, or have a vested interest in the issue.
- \* Look for conflicts or issues. Is the writer educating you with the facts or is he trying to get you to think a certain way.
- \* Consider the conclusions. Was there enough information to support the conclusions?
- \* Study the pictures or supporting media. Do they adequately and fairly represent the news they are supposed to be illustrating? Do they provide information or create an emotional response?
- \* Ensure you understand the words.
- \* Recognize when there is more than one reasonable approach to be taken on an issue.
- \* Compare alternative sources of information. Consider why the information, analysis,

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<sup>1</sup> This material comes from several sources, most importantly The Library of Congress, “Strategy List: 35 Dimensions of Critical Thought”

and interpretations differ.

## II. A Guide to Thinking with Care

1. Try to think for yourself. Our beliefs are acquired through socialization, which begins at an early age and runs throughout our life. Learn to question commonly accepted assumptions and ways of understanding things. Avoid passively accepting the viewpoints of others. Create and explore your own beliefs, methods of reasoning, and theories.

2. Remember we are under the influence of egocentricity, whereby we think that the way we see things is exactly the way things are and are, therefore, often unwilling to consider others' points of view or refuse to accept ideas or facts that are contrary to our own views.

3. As people are socialized, egocentricity, to some degree, evolves into sociocentricity. Egocentric tendencies extend to their groups. The individual goes from "I am right!" to "We are right!"

4. Consider the strengths and weaknesses of opposing points of view and try to overcome your egocentric tendency to identify truth/reality with your immediate perceptions or long-standing thought or belief.

5. While we need to simplify problems and experiences to make them easier to deal with, avoid oversimplification and misrepresentation. What is complex, intricate, ambiguous, or subtle is often viewed as simple, elementary, clear, and obvious. For example, we will talk about states as single-minded actors on the world stage. Yet states are not monolithic. The oversimplification is useful, but can be harmful to analysis. When using simplifying concepts, seek check to ensure useful simplifications are not misleading oversimplifications.

6. When giving or being given an interpretation, recognize the difference between evidence and interpretation, explore the assumptions on which interpretations are based and evaluate alternative interpretations for their relative strength.

7. Examine and evaluate your assumptions. Your analysis will be more effective if all the elements of your reasoning or behavior are explicit. Often you will base both your reasoning and your behavior on beliefs we take for granted. You are often unaware of these assumptions. Only by recognizing your assumptions can you evaluate their validity and usefulness.

8. You need to question your assumptions and consider, if necessary, alternative assumptions. Base your acceptance or rejection of assumptions on rational scrutiny. Hold questionable assumptions with an appropriate degree of tentativeness.

9. Understand the difference between those facts which are relevant to an issue and those which are not. Focus your attention on relevant facts and do not let irrelevant considerations affect your thinking. Whether or not something is relevant is often unclear; relevance must often be argued. Furthermore, a fact is only relevant or irrelevant in relation to an issue. Information relevant to one problem may not be relevant to another.

10 Recognize your tendency to make inferences that support your own egocentric or sociocentric world views and be careful to evaluate inferences you make when your interests or desires are involved. Remember, every interpretation is based on inference, and we interpret every situation we are in.