

Critical Writing

‘Your writing is too descriptive, you need to be more critical!’ – This is a common piece of feedback. This handout will help you approach critical writing with confidence

When assessing a text, you should consider the following...

Provenance

We can learn a lot about a text by considering *where it comes from*. Think about who wrote the text, and how this might influence it. All texts come from a specific time and place – it is important to consider these things.

Perspective

What viewpoint does the text present? Remember, it is just as important to consider what the text *leaves out*. It may be that the text only presents *some* of the relevant information – think about the effect of presenting the information in this way

Purpose

Why does the text exist? What does the writer hope to achieve by writing it?

Here is an example of applying the 3Ps to a source



H...one of the busiest men in town. While his door may say *Office Hours 2 to 4*, he's actually on call 24 hours a day.

The doctor is a scientist, a diplomat, and a friendly sympathetic human being all in one, no matter how long and hard his schedule.

According to a recent Nationwide survey:

MORE DOCTORS SMOKE CAMELS THAN ANY OTHER CIGARETTE

DOCTORS in every branch of medicine—113,597 in all—were queried in this nationwide study of cigarette preference. Three leading research organizations made the survey. The gist of the query was—What cigarette do you smoke, Doctor?

The brand named most was Camel!

The rich, full flavor and cool mildness of Camel's superb blend of costlier tobaccos seem to have the same appeal to the smoking tastes of doctors as to millions of other smokers. If you are a Camel smoker, this preference among doctors will hardly surprise you. If you're not—well, try Camels now.

Your "T-Zone" Will Tell You...

T for Taste... T for Throat... that's your proving ground for any cigarette. See if Camels don't suit your "T-Zone" to a "T."

CAMELS Costlier Tobaccos

Provenance

This text was written by the Camel cigarette company. It comes from the 1950s—the era in which the link between smoking and cancer was starting to become clear

Perspective

This text applies the Argument From Authority fallacy to the smoking. The text asks you to trust the picture of the doctor saying that smoking camels is good!

Purpose

This text is designed to sell Camel cigarettes by using a trusted authority figure. Given the **provenance**, it is also designed to reassure nervous consumers

So, how do we write about this?

As with all academic writing, clarity is key. You can use the following prompts to start your critical writing. Remember – it’s important to get straight to the point!

Provenance	Perspective	Purpose
This text originates from...	This text takes a _____ approach...	This text is intended to...
This text was produced by...	This text focuses on...	The purpose of this text is...
This text is from (year), which tells us...	This text chooses not to focus on...	Based on the provenance and perspective, this text is designed to...

For example....

“Amazon was founded in a garage in Seattle” (Amazon 2020)

This text is an account of Amazon’s early history written by Amazon itself. It is a consumer-facing text, and therefore has a vested interest in presenting the company in a positive light

This source takes an individualist approach. It emphasises Amazon’s humble beginnings and omits other factors such as the financial backing Bezos received from his parents to start the company

This source exists to promote Amazon and uses a relatable ‘rags to riches’ story to do so. The source is designed to portray Amazon positively

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