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*I would like to welcome you all to the new academic year with this first issue of our 2005/06 "New Chalk Talk" newsletter series. In a few days, **we will also be sending you** a supplement with **the list of workshops** CLT will be offering this semester and their descriptions. I hope you will join us and contribute to the rich discussions that usually take place during these workshops.*

Critical Reading: a guide for your students

***Dr Aziza Ellozy,
Director, Center for Learning and Teaching***

As is often the case, what we write about in this newsletter is inspired by the experience of one of our faculty members. This is one of those instances and, because it is directly related to improving critical thinking/reading/ writing skills of our students, we think that other AUC teaching faculty may find it useful.

Last semester, Professor X was faced with a class of juniors and seniors, whose performance in reading and critiquing articles/texts was frustratingly inadequate. This semester, Professor X is trying different approaches, including making use of a simple 2-page guide which the Center for Learning and Teaching was asked to prepare. It is this guide that we are publishing here.

How to Read Critically

In general,

- When reading a text avoid looking only or primarily **for information**, rather
- Look for **ways of thinking** about the subject matter: how the evidence is used and interpreted, how the author reaches his/her conclusions, etc.

Practical suggestions

1. Begin by **skimming** the article/text to get an idea what the author seems to be saying.
2. Check the meaning of unfamiliar terms.
3. **Highlight** argument not information: i.e. highlight those places where the author uses concepts, theories, data...etc. and note how she/he uses them to support a point, a thesis or come to a conclusion.
4. **Re-read** slowly and more carefully looking for and asking questions about:
 - a. The author's main **thesis**:
 - What is the main point the author is trying to make?
 - What is the purpose or central claim of the text/article?
 - b. The **context**
 - In what cultural, historical, political... context was it written?
 - Why did the author write this?
 - Who is the audience? Is it hostile or friendly?

- c. The **kind of reasoning** the author uses
 - Are certain concepts, theories or methods used?
 - How are they used to interpret data, evidence?
 - How are they used to support the main thesis?
 - d. The **evidence** the author uses to support an argument
 - Is the evidence statistical, historical, literary...?
 - What kinds of sources are being used? Are they primary or secondary sources?
5. If you have done all this so far, your reading is already critical, but you will need to go further and **evaluate** the argument and the supporting evidence. For this you will need to:
- a. Recognize what has been left unsaid by
 - Distinguishing between a statement of fact and a statement of opinion.
 - Recognizing underlying assumptions; are they explicit (stated) or implicit (hidden) assumptions?
 - Recognizing bias, i.e. noting the presence and nature of a writer's or speaker's prejudice.
 - b. Assess the strength and weaknesses of an argument.
 - Why is it strong? Could it be better?
 - Is the supporting evidence good?
 - Could the evidence be interpreted differently?

Sources

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- Deborah Knott, "Critical reading towards critical writing". Retrieved Sept. 15, 2005 at <http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/critrdg.html>

Share with us your experiences by contributing to the New Chalk Talk series, or by simply sending comments/suggestions to aellozy@aucegypt.edu