



Session

READING CRITICALLY

At the end of this session, international students will:

- Be able to read for different levels of meaning
- Appreciate the need to read beyond literal meaning in postgraduate study
- Have begun to appreciate how to think and read critically

How and when to use this material

This session follows on from the session **Reading: scanning, skimming and previewing**.

It familiarises students with reading practices associated with good scholarship and also introduces them to critical thinking.

It is intended for Communication/Media/PR lecturers wishing to spend some seminar time introducing students to scholarly approaches to reading and thinking critically about unit reading content through the use of an exemplar. This session is particularly relevant in the lead-up to an essay assignment where students must reflect on the readings in a scholarly way. Further related sessions are **Reading and summarising formal language: News articles**, and **Organising ideas through summary and synopsis**.

This session involves three short activities, two of which are based on suggested article reading material that may be substituted for one relevant to the student's own unit content. Students will practise exercises derived from the Three Level Model of Reading Comprehension so that they can:

- Read for literal meaning (i.e. the information is 'right there')

- Read for inferred meaning (i.e. after searching within the whole text, students have to deduce what is the underlying, intended meaning of the author that may not be explicitly stated)
- Read the text from an evaluative perspective, for both evaluative and creative meanings (i.e. students need to bring additional information and perspectives to the text and make judgements and recommendations or predictions).

If lecturers are interested in background information about the Chinese learning culture related to reading and critical thinking, the following two Briefing Notes may be useful: **Why Chinese postgraduate students struggle with listening, reading, writing and speaking in English**, and **Critical and creative thinking and questioning**.

Introduction

Learning to read beyond the literal meaning is an important skill for critical thinking and writing at the postgraduate level. However, it is important to remember that levels of reading comprehension are tied to language proficiency and familiarity with structure and function of specific genres or text-types. This session involves two exercises to enable students to practise reading at different levels in order to source different information. There is an additional follow-up activity for students whose English is more advanced.

Student activity 1: Introduction to reading for meaning

- Give students the **Handout: Jing's great career** and ask them to jot down answers to the questions, as follows:

At twenty-three, Jing was not a television producer, even though he aspired to be one. He felt like he had not done anything great in his working life. He mainly helped out in his uncle's computer company in Beijing. Although this was satisfying, he felt unfulfilled. Probably the only thing of importance he had done was to set up an online forum where people could raise environmental concerns and protest about issues such as air pollution, and water contamination, which contrasted with Western beliefs about Chinese media.

1. Is Jing a television producer? (Literal)
2. What had Jing done that he considered to be worthwhile? (inferential)
3. Why do you think it is suggested in the text that Western beliefs about the Chinese media may be incorrect? (Evaluative)

4. How, if at all, might these ideas be useful to an Australian new media entrepreneur looking to enter the Chinese market later in the year? (Creative)
- After working individually, students should then compare their answers with a colleague. Then, choose pairs to respond out loud to the class. Note answers on the whiteboard.
 - Now discuss with students how this simple text can be read in multiple ways:
 1. **Literally**: where the information is 'right there'
 2. **Inferentially**: where students have to think, as well as search within the text, for the information required
 3. **Evaluatively** (which includes **creatively**): where students need to bring additional information and perspectives to the text and make judgements and recommendations or predictions.

Note to Lecturer

The evaluative level often includes not only judgements but also creative considerations which might involve projections, predictions or recommendations, for example. In media and communication studies, it is important for students to be proficient at the creative level of reading comprehension. For instance, reading texts for creative meaning enables public relations students to construct recommendations for future practice in a variety of contexts.

Student activity 2: Identifying different levels of meaning in an academic article

Lecturer input

- In advance of this session, give students a short article about a topical or controversial issue to read through carefully in advance of this session (For example, see the 3-page article by Veil, S and Yang, A. 2012. 'Media manipulation in the Sanlu milk contamination crisis' *Public Relations Review*, (38), 935-937).
 - Remind students that postgraduates need to make high-level judgements and come up with creative solutions on the basis of their reading and research. Therefore they need to think on more than one level as they read. This exercise will assist them to read in a more 'critical' or 'scholarly' way as they search for different meanings.
-
- Give students time to re-read **the introductory paragraph** to the Veil and Yang article.
 - Show students the **Slide: Reading beyond the literal questions**, or print off and distribute as a handout:
 1. What is the author's view about the impact of the media environment on public relations practices? (Inferred)
 2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "Public relations cannot be ethical without high levels of media transparency". (Evaluative)
 3. If a similar situation were to occur in Australia, how might the role of a corporate PR adviser prevent the crisis escalating? (Creative)
 4. What health issues occurred as a result of the Sanlu Milk Powder Scandal? (Literal)
 - Now ask students to take five minutes to discuss with the student next to them which of the four questions on the slide asks for a simple (literal) reading of the text (what information is 'right there'?).
 - Then ask students to identify which question requires them to to:
 1. Deduce the authors' **underlying meaning**?
 2. Form a **judgement**?
 3. Consider **possible responses** to the situation?

Student activity 3: Pulling out key points from the reading

The article used in the previous activity (Veil, S and Yang, A. 2012, 'Media manipulation in the Sanlu milk contamination crisis' *Public Relations Review*, (38), 935-937) can be used as an example, or another reading can be set. Students should have read this article before coming to this session.

Note to Lecturer

This activity can follow immediately and build on the previous activity, or can be carried out in a later session. However, ensure that whichever article you choose as an exemplar is one that students already have familiarised themselves with. This is because Chinese students are often unversed in reading scholarly articles (whether in Chinese or English) and therefore need more time even for scanning or skimming. Especially when in their first semester in Australia, it is not a good idea to ask them to read something quickly - and new - in class. Better to ask everyone to read in advance of the session.

- Explain that good postgraduate essays will demonstrate that students have read articles on a number of levels, *not just literal*. In this exercise, students will practise finding different levels of information from a reading.
- Divide students into three groups. Each group should take five minutes to discuss the following:
 1. Group One: What is not explicit but an *underlying meaning*
 2. Group Two: The authors' *judgements*
 3. Group Three: The authors' *possible responses or recommendations*
- The group members should then take another five minutes to highlight one or two phrases in the article which **provide evidence** for the authors' underlying meanings, judgements and possible responses to the Sanlu crisis.
- Student groups are asked either to feed back the phrases they identify to the main group, or to write these on sticky notes and position on the whiteboard under each of the three headings. Compare and discuss.

Lecturer input: Summary

Discuss with students how reading beyond the literal requires you to take account of multiple ideas. Evaluative and creative reading (and questioning), in particular, requires you to identify and weigh up lots of ideas. Wide reading assists you to do this.

Remind students that learning to read beyond the literal meaning is an important skill for critical thinking and writing at the postgraduate level. By reading beyond the literal, we are engaging critical thinking and reading skills.

Student activity 4: Personal glossary

Students to add new / key vocabulary / phrases to their personal glossary from their learning in this session. They might also look over their current unit guides and note down any unfamiliar words in their glossary.

Each student to share one phrase with the whole group.

Note to lecturer

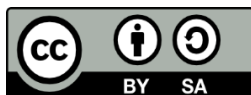
The creation and ongoing development of a personal glossary enables students to build a working vocabulary - with definitions - for important, unfamiliar or frequently encountered concepts, idioms and metaphors that will be useful during their study of media and communication.

Produced for the project
'Collaborating for Success: Enhancing the Transition of
Chinese students into Australian postgraduate education'

Additional materials and resources are available from
<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>

Project Team
Christine Daymon (Murdoch University, Project Leader)
Lindy Norris (Murdoch University)
Maree Keating (Victoria University)
Fiona Henderson (Victoria University)
Haixia Yu (Communication University of China)
Dawei Wang (Communication University of China)
Jennie Bickmore-Brand
Linda Butcher (Murdoch, Project Manager)
Yibing Liu (Research Assistant)

Support for the production of this publication has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.



Unless otherwise noted, content on this site is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Unported License

Information on the creative commons licence can be found at:
<http://creativecommons.org/licences>

2015