

# Four Reading Tasks to Promote Critical Thinking

When it comes to reading skills, students often seem to read with only the goal of finding the answers to the comprehension questions printed in their textbook.

Many students read the words without considering the implications of what they are reading; critical thinking is absent.

In this webinar, we will:

- explore four simple reading tasks that build students' critical thinking skills
- consider how to use each task with students of varying ages and proficiency levels



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# Jeremy Beal



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# Four Reading Tasks to Promote Critical Thinking



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# This is an easy assignment, right?

Find and read an article about American history.

Submit:

- Reference info
- Write two sentences:
  - 1) Something you learned
  - 2) Something you found interesting



# I gave them clearer guidelines:

Do **NOT** give me a copy of the article!

## Submit:

1. Article title, author's name, webpage
2. Two sentences:
  - One thing I learned was \_\_\_\_\_.
  - One interesting thing is that \_\_\_\_\_.

## Example:

“Why English settlers moved to America”

Author: John Doe.

Webpage: [www.amhist.com/settlers](http://www.amhist.com/settlers)

One thing I learned was that the English settlers didn't know how to farm.

One interesting thing is that some Native Americans could already speak English.



# A failed assignment

*Student responses from an article about early English immigrants to America:*

- One thing I learned was they also found that they were in the wrong place.
- One interesting thing is that the Mayflower sailed back to England in April 1621.

# Agenda:

What is critical thinking in reading?

Reading task 1: Respond to the reading

Reading task 2: Apply it to your life

Reading task 3: Agree/Disagree

Reading task 4: Extend the author's ideas

# Your Classroom



What's one way your students need to use critical thinking while reading? Type your answer in the chat!





# What is critical thinking?

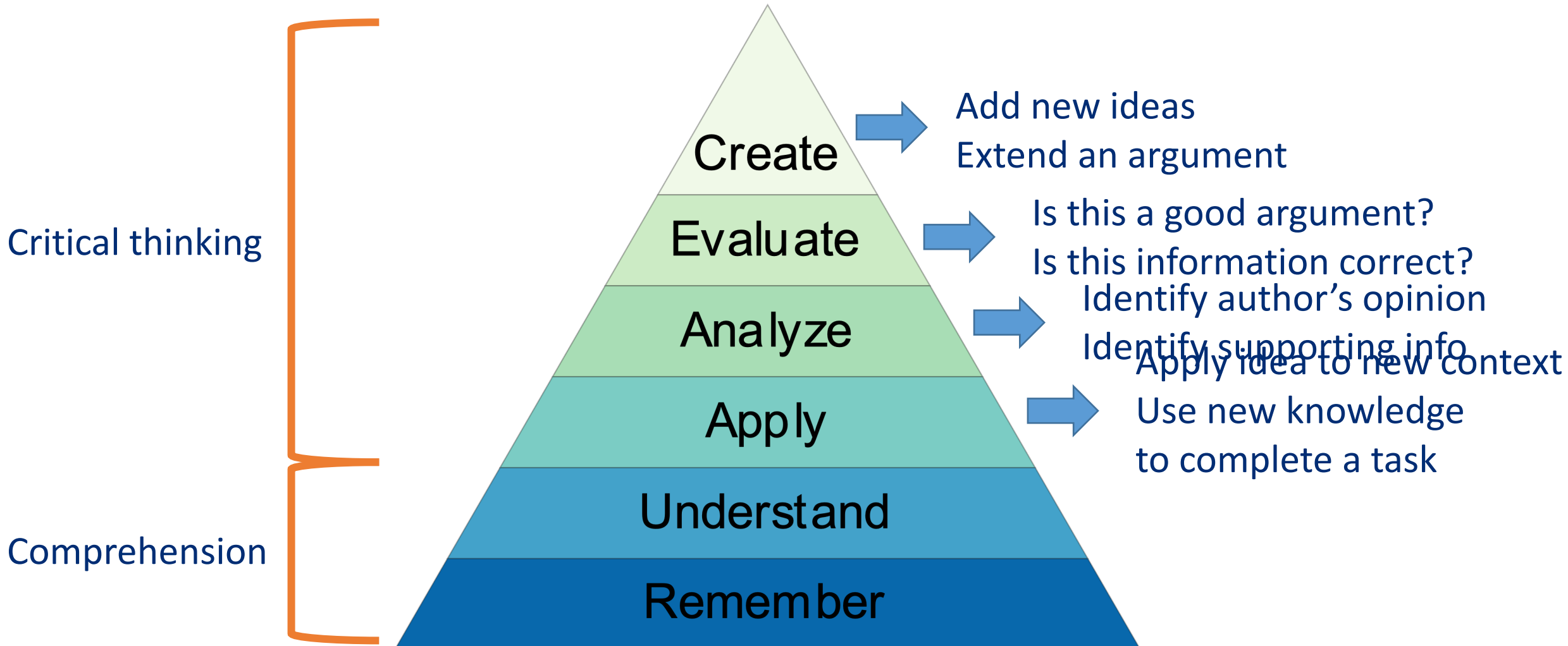
“understanding and analysing ideas and arguments...evaluating ideas and arguments...solving problems and making decisions” (Cambridge, 2020)

“The ability of receiving, collecting, and analysing information effectively” (Shiroma, 2022)

Example of basic critical thinking:

- 1) Put a concept into your own words
- 2) Elaborate on that concept
- 3) Give real-life examples of it (Elder & Paul, 2010)

# Bloom's Taxonomy



# Your Classroom

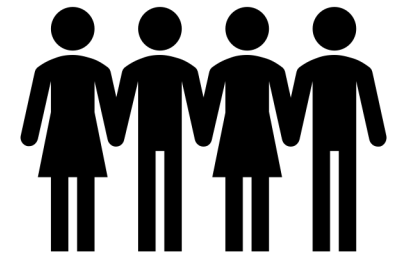
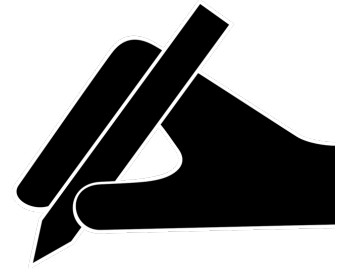
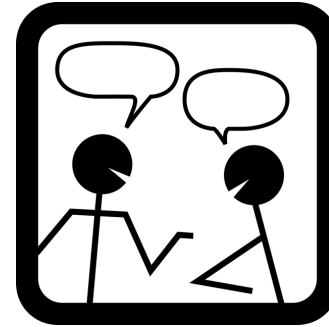


What reading materials do you use in your classroom?  
How well do they address critical thinking skills?  
Type your answers in the chat!



# General considerations

- Age and proficiency level of your students
- Format of the task:
  - Spoken response
  - Written response
  - Written and then spoken
  - Individual, pair, or group task
- Grammar/vocabulary



# Agenda:

What is critical thinking in reading?



Reading task 1: Respond to the reading

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# Reading task 1: Respond to the reading

Students give their personal reaction to the reading

- What do you like or dislike about this story?

Benefits:

- How did this poem make you feel?
- Encourages students to think about the reading
- What part of the article is most interesting to you?
- Lets students know they can form an opinion about what they read
- What is something you have learned from reading this?
- Breaks the ice: Prepares students for further analysis of the text



# Consider proficiency level

Beginners: Choose a response from a list of options.

- “This story makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_ (happy, sad, bored, interested).”
- “I really like / like / don’t like / really dislike this story because it is \_\_\_\_.”

Intermediate: Complete a sentence.

- “I like the part where \_\_\_\_\_.”

Advanced: More thorough and free response.

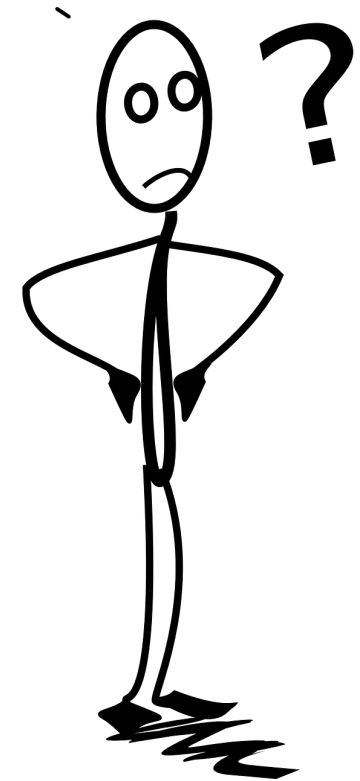
- “How do you feel about this story? Give two reasons why.”

# Your Classroom



What is one challenge you might encounter with this type of task?

Type it in the chat!



# Potential challenges and solutions

Challenges	Solutions
Students hesitate to share their true opinion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have students write down their ideas before sharing.</li><li>• Have students share in pairs or small groups.</li></ul>
Students say that no part of the reading is interesting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask students why it isn't interesting.</li><li>• Ask them what could make the text more interesting.</li></ul>
Students say they didn't learn anything from the text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask them to identify a new word or phrase from the text.</li></ul>

# Agenda:

What is critical thinking in reading?

Reading task 1: Respond to the reading



Reading task 2: Apply it to your life

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# Reading task 2:

## Apply the reading to your life

Simple prompts of real-life examples connected to the reading

- Describe a time when this happened to you.

Benefits: How is your family similar to the one in the story? How is it

- different?
- Makes reading personal and relevant to students' lives
- (Academic): The article says firstborn children tend to do better in school. Is this true in your experience?
- Reinforces reading comprehension
- Helps students learn and use new vocabulary

# Sample task for young learners

Colors can change the feeling of a room. For example, if a room is painted a warm color, like red, orange, or yellow, it will feel warmer. And a room painted cool colors like green or blue feels cooler. The color can also affect the mood of a room. A room with lots of red can feel more exciting. On the other hand, rooms that are mainly green make people feel calmer.

Beginning-level prompt:

What are the main colors in your bedroom?

My bedroom feels \_\_\_\_\_.

(Choose a word: exciting, calm, happy, sad, warm, cool)



# Sample task for young learners

Sequence:

1. (Individual) Students write their response.
2. (Whole class) Practice the following conversation:  
Student A: “What are the main colors in your bedroom?”  
Student B: “My bedroom is \_\_\_\_\_. It feels \_\_\_\_\_.”
3. (Whole class) Demonstrate the conversation with a student.
4. (Whole class) Have two students demonstrate the conversation.
5. (Pairs) All students have the conversation with a partner.
6. (Pairs) Repeat with 5 different partners, and then sit down when finished.

# Your Classroom



Stop and reflect. How would you have intermediate students apply the text to their lives? How about advanced students?

Colors can change the feeling of a room. For example, if a room is painted a warm color, like red, orange, or yellow, it will feel warmer. And a room painted cool colors like green or blue feels cooler. The color can also affect the mood of a room. A room with lots of red can feel more exciting. On the other hand, rooms that are mainly green make people feel calmer.

# Apply the reading to your life:

## Sample prompts for different students

### Beginning:

What are the main colors in your bedroom? My bedroom feels \_\_\_\_\_ (provide several words to choose from).

### Intermediate:

Describe the colors in your bedroom. How do the colors affect the feeling of the room?

### Advanced:

If you changed the colors in our classroom, what changes would you make and why?

# Agenda:

What is critical thinking in reading?

Reading task 1: Respond to the reading

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Reading task 3: Agree/Disagree

Reading task 4: Extend the author's ideas

# Reading task 3: Agree / Disagree

Students say whether they agree or disagree with an idea from the text

Sample prompts:

Benefits:

- The author states that \_\_\_\_\_.
- The “heart” of critical thinking: Do you agree or disagree? Why?  
Analyzing and evaluating ideas
- How do you feel about the idea that \_\_\_\_\_?
- Encourages a critical mindset: Give your opinion on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree).



# Your Classroom



What is a creative way to have students express agreement or disagreement with an idea from a reading text? Type your answer in the chat!





# More ways to express agreement or disagreement

- Students move to a part of the room based on whether they agree or disagree.
- On the board, students write their reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with an idea.
- Provide a list of reasons that support or go against an idea. Have students rank them from strongest to weakest.
- Students share their opinion and reasons with a partner. Then they share their partner's opinion and reasons with another student.

# Agenda:

What is critical thinking in reading?

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Reading task 4: Extend the author's ideas

# Reading task 4:

## Extend the author's ideas

Students add their own ideas to the text

Sample prompts:

Benefits:

- Extend the story: What will happen next?
- Uses higher-level critical thinking
  - What's missing from the text?
- Write another example to illustrate this idea.
  - How can this argument be stronger?
- Top levels of Bloom's taxonomy:
  - Add another reason to support the author's opinion. Evaluate and Create
- What is competing with your thinking?
  - What objectives could have discussed?



# Consider grammar and vocabulary

## Prompt:

Add another reason to support the author's opinion.

## Possible teaching points:

- Transitions
  - "Another reason is"
  - "\_\_\_\_\_ is also a good reason because...")
- Noun clauses
  - "Another important reason is that\_\_\_\_\_."

# Consider grammar and vocabulary



Look at the prompt below. What grammar and vocabulary do students need to give a good response? Type your answers in the chat!

Prompt:

What is something else you think the author should have mentioned?

# Consider grammar and vocabulary

## Prompt:

What is something you think the author should have mentioned?

## Possible teaching points:

- Present perfect with modals: “The author should have said...”
- Third conditional: “It would have been helpful if the author had discussed...”
- Lower levels? Past tense: “The author didn’t say ... but it’s important because...”



# Recap: Four reading tasks

**Task 1:** Respond to the reading

**Task 2:** Apply it to your life

**Task 3:** Agree / Disagree

**Task 4:** Extend the author's ideas

*Remember to consider...*

- ✓ *...how you want students to respond*
- ✓ *...how to adapt the task to students' English ability*
- ✓ *...what grammar and vocabulary they need*



# Reflection: Your Classroom



What's a task from today's webinar that you want to use to help your students develop critical thinking in reading?



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# Thank you!

**Questions or concerns?**

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# Reflection Questions

1. Which of the four activities we explored today will you be able to use or adapt in your reading-focused instruction?
2. How does asking students to relate a text to their life experiences and prior knowledge encourage critical thinking?
3. We examined post-reading activities in this webinar. How might you incorporate the more complex Bloom's Taxonomy skills in pre-reading activities to encourage critical thinking before and during students' engagement with a text?



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