

Literacy and Numeracy for NCEA Level 1 - Reading

Identifying the purpose of a text

Content

This resource supports the teaching and learning of comprehension strategies that can be used in conjunction with Unit Standard 26624: Read texts with understanding. 'Reading with understanding' assumes learners are *active* meaning makers, not passive consumers of text. This means that learners must be able to use *strategies* to facilitate meaning making and that they have a range of strategies they can employ when meaning breaks down. This resource is part of a set of resources which include teaching and learning sequences designed to develop learners' ability to apply a strategy. The sequence is suitable for learners in any context which requires reading texts.

Alignment

The content aligns with steps 3, 4 and 5 of the Reading Critically progression, and supports learners in describing a text in terms of its explicit and implicit ideas and/or the writer's purpose.

	READING CRITICALLY PROGRESSION
	MOST ADULTS WILL BE ABLE TO:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify writers' purposes and ways in which writers use ideas and language to suit their purposes • identify a variety of sources for specific information and use strategies to compare and evaluate information within or across different texts.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use strategies to analyse ideas and information and to reflect critically on surface meanings and underlying meanings • evaluate the validity (truth) of information in relation to the writer's purpose and/or the reader's purpose.

Fig 1. Steps 3, 4 and 5 of the Reading Critically progression

Intent

The intent of this teaching and learning resource is to provide learners with a range of questions that can be applied to various texts to help them identify the writer's purpose.

The questions are designed to *support* learners to investigate the texts they are reading. They do not all have to be used and can be adapted. They can be used individually, in pairs, or as a whole-class activity.

These questions are critical in nature and can be used to 'unpack' the text. They are not designed to provide an exhaustive method of interrogating a text. However, they are a good starting point for learners and can be used to orient them toward a critical approach.

Sequence

There are three parts to this sequence. The first part is optional and is included to provide ideas for developing learners' understanding of critical reading. Parts 2 and 3 are designed to be used in a sequence.

1. Explore and understand a critical viewpoint
2. Identify the text type
3. Identify the purpose and critique the text.

1. Explore and understand a critical viewpoint

This first part is designed to support the learner to begin to think about how to be critical of a text and to take different perspectives. The steps below can facilitate a conversation with learners. Examples can be changed to more relevant contexts.

Step one: Ask learners to discuss in groups what it means to be critical of something. Additional questions might include:

- Can you critique something and still enjoy it?
- Is a critique the same as criticising?
- Can you critique the performance of a sports team that you *like* and what effect might a critique have?

Step two: Ask the groups to share what they discussed. Then make the following points:

- you can critique things you enjoy
- coaches critique the performance of their own teams and others constantly
- critiques are necessary to make things better
- critiques are not criticisms (although they may include this)

Step three: Everybody has a different perspective, and each perspective leads to a different critique. For example, the coach of the All Blacks will critique their games in a different way to how an opposing player, advertiser or sponsor might do this. The coach will look at

strengths and mistakes and try to understand the causes of these. In contrast, the advertiser may look at ways to make the team more popular. During the game, they will notice different things. Likewise, the owners of the stadium may view the game from the viewpoint of how tense or emotional it is. For them, a close game is a good game, because it is likely to motivate people to return.

Ask the class to think about a popular movie. Then have learners break into groups and think about how the following people would react to the movie, and why:

- themselves
- their mothers
- their grandmothers
- a child under the age of eight
- a teenager
- someone who invested money in the film
- one of the actors in the movie
- a nun
- an adult aged between 24 and 40

Write some of the key points for each person on the board. For example, grandmothers might find the content unpleasant or shocking (e.g., swearing, violence, etc.). Ask learners which of these people the movie is most likely targeted at: What is the target audience?

Step four: Discuss with the class that thinking about how the movie might be perceived by *other* people is part of taking a critical perspective.

It may be helpful to think of it as putting on different pairs of glasses, each with different lenses. Thinking about how different people might view the movie is like changing the glasses.

Critical lenses can also include thinking about the movie from various perspectives. These include, but are not limited to:

- money issues (Will it make money? Why? Will it stop others making money?)
- social issues (Does it support positive social behaviours? Does it promote anti-social behaviours?)
- gender issues (Are genders represented fairly? Is the movie written for one more than the other? Is one gender positioned in a particular way? Is this fair?)
- moral issues (What morals or ethics are represented? Is a particular view supported? What is not discussed?)

These types of questions can be asked of any type of text, such as novels, articles, newspaper articles, or even course workbooks. Learners may ask more appropriate or nuanced questions, or they may simply choose not to read critically. However, the questions are designed to support learners to 'unpack' a text to identify its explicit and implicit purpose.

2. Identify the text type

The following questions are designed to help learners identify the type of text they are reading. This will help them identify the purpose of their text in the following section. Keep in mind that not all texts fit nicely into types.

Step one: Learners select a text. Provide them with a set of questions and have them work through the questions in the table below to identify (broadly) the type of text they have selected.

Text type questions

Questions	Probable text type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the text teach you <i>how</i> to do something? • Does the text include steps needed to do something? 	Procedural text
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the text <i>explain</i> how or why something works? • Does the text give reasons for things? 	Explanatory text
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the text describe something? • What is being described? 	Descriptive text
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the text a story? • Is there a main character? 	Narrative text
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the writer giving their opinion, and/or trying to persuade you of something? • Can you identify the writer's opinion? 	Persuasive text

3. Identify the purpose and critique the text

Once the learner has identified the type of text they have selected, provide them with the appropriate set of questions below. The learner can then work through the questions independently, with a peer, or with support from a tutor. The questions for each text type are on the following pages.

Questions for a procedural text

This type of text is most likely designed to teach you something. Work through the questions to identify the purpose.

Questions	Response
<p>Is the purpose of the text clearly written in the opening statement of the text?</p> <p>The purpose may be in the title, but it can also be stated at the beginning of the text, usually in the first or second sentence.</p> <p>Underline, copy or highlight this purpose.</p>	
<p>This type of text usually provides a list of materials needed to complete a task.</p> <p>Are the materials presented in the order in which they are used?</p> <p>For example, if the text is a recipe, the ingredients are usually listed in order of use. Are the materials in your text?</p>	
<p>This type of text usually has a series of steps to follow. These are usually in a logical order.</p> <p>Are they? Could this be improved?</p>	
<p>Is each step clear? For example, does each step start with a verb such as: <i>Mix eggs with flour.</i> Could they be written in a clearer manner?</p>	
<p>How much about the topic does the reader need to know in order to understand the instructions?</p> <p>Are pictures or diagrams included to support the reader? Could they be improved?</p>	
<p>The purpose of this text was to teach/show me how to ...</p> <p>The writer did this by</p>	

Questions for an explanatory text

This type of text is most likely written to explain something, perhaps how something works or why things happen. Work through the following questions to identify the purpose.

Questions	Response
<p>Does the opening statement give an overview of the object, process, concept or idea being explained?</p> <p>Underline, copy or highlight exactly what is being explained.</p>	
<p>Is the explanation of a process, an object, a concept, a material, or an idea?</p> <p>Once you have read the text, think about whether you understand the explanation? Was the text useful to you?</p>	
<p>Does your text describe things in a sequence?</p> <p>For example, if it is about how a motor works, it might begin with an explanation of a cylinder and piston, then move to how fuel is injected, and then how the fuel is combusted with a spark.</p>	
<p>Does the sequence make sense to you?</p> <p>Are the steps in the sequence evenly spread, or are some harder to understand than others?</p>	
<p>Could the steps within the sequence be made any clearer?</p> <p>Were there diagrams? Could other pictures have helped?</p>	
<p>The purpose of the text was to explain...</p> <p>The writer did this by...</p>	

Questions for a descriptive text

This type of text is most likely written to describe something. These texts often follow a standard pattern that makes them easier to understand. Work through the following questions to identify the purpose.

Questions	Response
<p>Is the object or topic being described stated clearly in the opening paragraph?</p>	
<p>Are the features of the object or topic clearly stated? What are the features?</p> <p>For example, a description of rugby might include the overall sport structure; the rules of the game; the players and how they interact on the field; equipment, coaches and refs; training and injuries; specific players or teams.</p>	
<p>Is each of the features described well? Can you notice a structure that is repeated across each feature?</p> <p>Often descriptive texts describe what something is, what it has, what it can do, where it is found, and its historical situation.</p> <p>Has the writer followed this pattern? If not, do you think it might have helped?</p>	
<p>Did the text achieve its purpose of describing the object or topic?</p>	
<p>Could the text have been improved?</p> <p>For example, could pictures have been used to better effect, or could it have been structured better?</p>	
<p>The purpose of this text was to describe...</p> <p>The writer did this by ...</p>	

Questions for a narrative text

This type of text can be designed to entertain or teach you something. In fact, there are many purposes for this type of text, but the following questions can be used to help identify some.

Questions	Response
<p>Identify the main characters and the setting. The setting might include the time when the story takes place and the environment.</p> <p>For example, settings might include the wild west, another planet, a city or town.</p>	
<p>The main character is called the protagonist. In most stories the protagonist makes decisions and experiences the consequences.</p> <p>Who is the main character (protagonist) and what are the main decisions or actions they make?</p>	
<p>Some stories have an antagonist. The antagonist is the character who opposes the main character.</p> <p>In your text, is there an antagonist? Think about what motivates them?</p>	
<p>The text can place the characters into a complicated and challenging situation.</p> <p>Can you clearly describe the situation?</p> <p>It could include physical danger, a moral decision between right and wrong, or solving a problem.</p>	
<p>Does the main character overcome a challenge? If so, think about what the character learned, or how they changed over the course of the story. Often, the lesson the main character learned is what the writer wanted the reader to learn.</p>	
<p>The purpose of the story is ...</p> <p>The writer did this by ...</p>	

Questions for a persuasive text

Persuasive texts are designed to influence or change your opinion about something. They can come in a variety of forms, and can include advertisements, editorials, essays, speeches, debates, leaflets or brochures. The writer can state very clearly what their purpose is, but this is not always the case. They also use certain techniques that are interesting to think about. Work through the questions below to identify the writer's purpose.

Questions	Response
<p>Does your text clearly state the writer's opinion and purpose in the opening sections?</p> <p>Or has the writer left it until later in the text?</p> <p>Or does s/he not state it explicitly?</p>	
<p>Do you agree with the writer's overall argument or opinion?</p>	
<p>A persuasive text can consist of several smaller arguments that support the main argument.</p> <p>Can you find each of the smaller arguments? Underline, copy or highlight them.</p>	
<p>Is one of the arguments better than the others?</p> <p>Is one explained better than the others? Why do you think so?</p>	
<p>Does the writer give an argument that you think is weak?</p>	
<p>Has the writer ignored, or not mentioned something that might not support their argument?</p>	
<p>The purpose of the text is to persuade you to ...</p> <p>The writer did this by ...</p>	