

# Critical Reading Strategies in the Advanced English Classroom

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## Abstract

The aims of this paper are to inform educators about the latest findings into critical reading strategies based on a comprehensive literature review, identify the frequency of critical reading strategy usage by advanced EFL students, and to outline a procedure by which learners can transition from comprehending a text to critically evaluating it. This paper highlights the most important critical reading strategies for advanced EFL tertiary courses, synthesized from the current findings from the literature on critical reading. In particular, it proposes reading strategies for authentic non-fiction passages, including strategies specific to academic and online media texts that have not been graded for EFL learners. Reading resources for advanced EFL courses can be sourced from a wealth of authentic material but pose challenges in terms of complexity and quality. By adopting critical reading strategies, learners can navigate authentic texts to identify the author's purpose, persuasive elements, and bias to read and respond with an informed perspective. The study also reports on survey findings about the frequency of use of both critical and comprehension-based reading strategies by advanced EFL college students. The survey found that comprehension-based reading strategies were used more often than critical reading strategies but some critical reading strategies such as *distinguishing between main and supporting ideas* and *making relevant inferences* were used autonomously by the participants. Based on the survey results, this paper identifies a number of critical reading strategies that need greater attention in the classroom, for example *identifying rhetorical devices*, and describes best practice for teaching them.

**Key Terms:** Critical reading strategies, advanced EFL English, authentic texts, online texts

## 1. Introduction

It is of paramount importance that EFL students have the right reading strategies to successfully construct meaning from texts. Moving beyond comprehension, advanced EFL learners need to approach texts with a critical eye. The Internet has given students access to a plethora of information, yet the quality and factual accuracy of the information available must be called into question as anyone can author and publish content without editorial control or peer review. Preparing advanced EFL students to be able to assess such authentic sources is a necessary task and this paper argues that explicitly teaching reading strategies can empower students to evaluate, critique, and strategically utilize authentic texts in an independent and insightful manner. Reading strategies can be defined as the cognitive processes involved when readers purposefully attempt to understand a text (Barnett, 1989, p. 66). By way of a literature review and survey, this study highlights some of the most appropriate reading strategies for advanced EFL college students to foster critical reading skills, such as *identifying rhetorical devices* and *questioning the author's assumptions*. This paper summarizes the critical reading strategies which are crucial for informed and independent interpretations of authentic texts by EFL college students who may not have the language proficiency necessary to transfer such strategies from their first language (L1). It also seeks to identify which of these key strategies are not being sufficiently utilized by students to

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reveal areas where teachers could explicitly introduce and practice such strategies in the classroom.

A survey was conducted to identify which critical reading strategies students use the least, as a diagnostic tool for assessing a hierarchy of need for teaching reading strategy instruction. The participants in the sample were all enrolled in an advanced EFL debate course at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University in Japan, where critical reading was a core component of the course in order to prepare evidence for use in debates on controversial issues, such as abortion and gun control. For the purposes of this study, advanced English equates with the B2 band of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as this represents the proficiency level of the survey participants. The participants had to read authentic texts, such as academic journal articles, newspaper articles, and government reports. They were expected to produce critical reflection and commentary of such sources during the debates. Given these requirements, critical reading strategies were an important resource for disseminating what, for many of them, were challenging readings. From an analysis of the survey results, a discussion follows about which reading strategies were not being fully utilized by the students, and how to remedy such reading instruction deficits, as a means of comprehensively addressing the teaching of critical reading strategies to advanced EFL college students.

### **1.1 Rationale**

The advances of the Internet in terms of delivering textual information en masse has given rise to a renewed awareness about the quality of texts. There are plenty of examples of texts on the Internet that have factual inaccuracies, bias, and manipulative content and readers need to be able to critically analyze the information presented to them. Whilst around 44% of Americans read their news online via Facebook, 38% of the information on major political Facebook pages has been found to be false or misleading (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). It can be argued that social media platforms in particular care more about whether content is shared and liked, than whether the content is factually true. Such metrics drive the distribution of information through algorithms that value the quantity and popularity of content, which has caused hyperbole and misinformation to proliferate. Whilst all readers need to be vigilant, it is difficult for second language (L2) learners in particular to filter the trustable from the untrustworthy when dealing with authentic texts which are increasingly sourced online. They need to be constantly aware of the factual accuracies and quality of content they encounter when they read such sources. Given the variability of authentic online texts, teachers need to empower their students with the cognitive resources to read authentic sources critically.

Given that one of the key objectives of the advanced English course was to conduct independent research to prepare evidence for use in debates meant students had to find, read and assess the strength of arguments contained in authentic, non-fiction texts. It was the challenges I observed when students were attempting to evaluate the quality of such difficult and variable sources that motivated this study. By identifying the critical reading strategies students do not adequately use, and explicitly teaching such strategies, students will be able to read and evaluate

authentic sources independently and with confidence.

## **2. Reading in a Second Language**

If reading is an interactive process between the text and the reader to co-construct meaning, then teachers need to know which reading strategies students are successfully using to facilitate that interaction and the students' subsequent interpretation. A student's schemata consists of their existing concepts about the world, or "knowledge already stored in memory" (Anderson & Pearson, 1984, p. 255). Comprehending texts requires more than just linguistic knowledge. Experience and culture shape readers' schemata and EFL readers' L1 can also influence their understanding and interpretation of English passages (Mikulecky, 2008). Every culture provides a different schemata of the world and teachers need to be equipped with the skills necessary to help students with varying world views. Learning to read in a foreign language entails dealing with different text types and entertaining different cultural beliefs. It involves changing the reader's values and cognitive processing, potentially modifying one's schemata.

As EFL students automatically reference their schemata based on cultural and experiential influences to interpret texts, reading instruction that engages this prior knowledge will strengthen their personal engagement with texts. Despite the importance of the reader using top-down processing with a sense of agency, teachers may overly focus on more receptive reading styles, as Fairclough (1992) observes, "there tends to be too much of an emphasis upon the text as product and too little emphasis upon the processes of producing and interpreting texts" (p. 28). Despite the inherent challenges of reading in a foreign language, EFL students are already well-equipped with cognitive skills, developed schemas about the world, and an awareness of text structures from their L1 which can be utilized and built upon through learning critical reading strategies. Given students' prior L1 knowledge, researchers have logically concluded that by employing reading strategies, EFL students can increase their reading comprehension. The question remains, which strategies need more attention in the classroom to improve critical literacy? Before addressing this pertinent research question, a summary of the definitions of critical reading follows.

### **2.1 What is Critical Reading?**

Critical reading is an investigation into, and critique of the validity of arguments expressed in reading passages (Walz, 2001). Underlying meanings are enmeshed within the surface, or face-value meaning of a text, which can seek to persuade the reader, sometimes with biased views, imbalanced presentation of evidence, or even purposefully including factual inaccuracies. It is the task of a critical reader to 'read between the lines' and undertake an analysis of a text to comprehensively grasp its full meaning. The term critical reading has multifarious meanings, but it can be broadly split into two distinct traditions; reading for academic success and reading for social engagement. According to Manarin, Carey, Rathburn, and Ryland (2015, p. 4) reading critically for academic success consists of the following key skills:

1. Identifying patterns of textual elements
2. Distinguishing between main and subordinate ideas
3. Evaluating credibility
4. Making judgments about how a text is argued
5. Making relevant inferences about the text

Reading critically for social engagement implies an understanding of how texts can be used to achieve social goals, for example, addressing gender or income inequality. To master critical reading, students also need to have an awareness of how literacy is used for social purposes, how an author may write to achieve their own ends, and how one should treat their own reflection on a text's meaning with a sense of social purpose. Wallace (2003) asserts that reading for social purposes is “social in the sense that readers and writers enact their roles as members of communities; social in that it unfolds in a social context, both an immediate and wider social context” (p. 9). It demands an interactive form of reading where there is a relationship between the text producers, receivers, the community, and the text itself. From this perspective, critical reading necessitates the following criteria:

1. Sifting through various forms of rhetoric
2. Recognizing power relations
3. Questioning assumptions
4. Engaging with the world
5. Constructing new possibilities (Manarin et al. 2015, p. 6)

Such a view of critical reading implies there are potential social and political outcomes from the critical analysis of texts. For example, stakeholders such as lobby groups, think tanks and NGOs will produce and interpret evidence presented in texts to advance their agendas. The tradition of critical reading for social purposes adheres to critical theory's questioning of, “inequalities and injustices that persist in society and how literacy instruction may become a site for contesting the status quo” (Siegel & Fernandez, 2000, p. 140). In sum, it calls upon the reader to interpret texts with a sense of social purpose and with an intent to use a text according to one's values.

Ultimately, both conceptions of critical reading share common features in that a reader must analyze the content by identifying and interpreting textual features coupled with contextual information in order to construct meaning. Furthermore, critical readers must recognize the assumptions made in a text and assess their argumentative validity. They must also evaluate the credibility of their own assumptions when reading a text. The ability to make inferences requires students to connect the ideas in a text with other texts and other forms of knowledge, particularly within the same genre or discipline. Broadly speaking, inference means to make connections between texts and one's own schemata, as well as interrelated social and academic conceptions and propositions. Spears (1999) described inference as “a statement about the unknown based on

the known” (p. 81). A student can reference their schemata to make inferences based on their own knowledge. Clues to an author's motivations may become apparent, especially if they contravene Grice's (1975, pp. 41-58) four maxims of truthful communication, that is; quality, quantity, relation and manner. The maxim of quality refers to the level of information provided and the maxim of quantity refers to truthful statements supported with evidence. The maxim of relation refers to the relevance to the field or issue being covered and the maxim of manner refers to an author's level of clarity. If an author contravenes any of these four maxims, a critical reader may be able to make inferences about an author's motivations and critique the efficacy of their argument. The skill of inference is particularly important when authors are overly biased, misuse facts or intentionally obscure the truth. By making inferences from texts, students can reach their own conclusions based not only on the author's statements but also their critical interpretation of them.

Whether a student is reading critically for academic purposes or for social engagement, not only comprehension, but also analysis, interpretation, and evaluation should be present. With the core skill of critical thinking at the heart of college education, EFL reading instruction for college students must cover these key critical reading skills. This will ensure students can comprehensively read academic and authentic texts and critically respond to them in their assignments. Despite the centrality of critical thinking in college education, and the fact that even early learners may also critique a text when making sense of it, EFL advanced reading is often still based on more foundational techniques, as Wallace (2003) states: “many models of second language reading have been ultimately reductive in their effects. For more advanced learners a comprehension view remains a dominant view” (p. 3). It is clear that reading instruction for advanced EFL students that attends to critical reading skills needs to be present to complement more comprehension-based reading strategies.

### **3. Literature Review**

The early literature on critical reading for native speakers (NSs) often focused on theoretical concerns whilst practical strategies only received broad guidelines for instruction. This trend has continued for both NSs and non-native speakers (NNSs) alike as Pennycook (2001) notes, “there has been a curious silence on concrete pedagogical matters” (p. 82). Early definitions of critical reading are abundant, yet disparate. Clymer (1968) published a critical reading taxonomy, whereas others formed a skill hierarchy (Robbins, 1977; Smith, 1974). Carver (1971) posited critical reading within a broader framework of comprehension skills, whereas Wright (1977) defined critical reading as a process, or operation, by which students can differentiate between valid and invalid arguments and reasoning. During the 1970s it was theorized that vocabulary development and critical reading had a positive correlation and therefore that schools should focus on vocabulary instruction to engender critical reading skills (Dale, 1976). Questioning skills were also advocated as a means to advance critical reading (Newton, 1978; Schick, 1973). In terms of strategy usage, Cognitive Psychology has shown that students who are consciously aware of what they are doing learn new thinking processes and strategies the most effectively. Such learners are aware of their

comprehension and can apply the most appropriate strategies when comprehending a text (Brown, 1978). Instructors need to make their learners consciously aware of the reading strategies they are employing in the classroom to increase the likelihood of strategy retention.

Another key finding related to strategy use is that interacting and talking about a reading passage helps students develop literacy skills. Heath (as cited in Mikulecky, 2008) found that when teachers encouraged their students to talk about reading passages, literacy improved. When teachers modeled comprehension, and when students talked together about how they understood texts, the students' comprehension increased. Talking about texts is an important activity for the EFL classroom to increase comprehension, share intercultural differences and develop literacy skills.

Despite the early divergent views on what critical reading is, and how it should be taught, evidence of successful skill instruction both at the high school and tertiary levels is numerous (Brownell, 1953; Kemp, 1963; Livingston, 1965; O'Brien, 1973). Wright (1977) successfully used workbook materials whereby valid and invalid arguments were presented to his students, who were tasked with identifying the correct forms of argumentation and reasoning. After a daily treatment for two weeks the students tested significantly higher than the control group, leading to the conclusion that workbook materials focusing specifically on the validity of arguments increased the students' critical reading skills. It must be noted that many of the early studies on critical reading lacked methodological rigor, such as the absence of a control group. Nonetheless, the overall results indicate that formal instruction in any age group bears improvement in critical reading skills (Patching, Kameenui, Carnine, Gersten, & Colvin, 1983).

Reaching consensus as to what constitutes the most beneficial reading strategies that EFL readers use has been similarly challenging. The first comprehensive classifications of second language reading strategies were offered by Hosenfeld (1977), Block (1986), and Sarig (1987, p. 107-120). Comparing the think aloud protocols of proficient and non-proficient readers, Hosenfeld (1977) concluded that successful readers read bigger chunks of text, skipped unimportant words, and had a positive attitude of themselves as readers. Conversely, less proficient readers tended to lose the meaning of phrases, read in smaller chunks, did not skim unimportant words, and had a negative view of themselves as readers. Sarig (1987, p. 110) identified four main categories of EFL reading strategies, namely:

- Technical-aid moves (e.g. skimming and scanning)
- Clarification and simplification moves (e.g. paraphrasing and synonyms)
- Coherence-detecting moves (e.g. using content and formal schemata)
- Monitoring moves (e.g. conscious planning, self-evaluation)

Block (1986) analyzed think aloud protocols of ESL college students and concluded their strategies could be divided into two broad types; general and local. General strategies refer to overall comprehension and include:

- Anticipating content
- Recognizing text structure
- Question information in the text
- Interpret the text
- Use general knowledge and associations
- Comment on behavior or processes
- Monitor comprehension
- Correct behavior
- React to the text

Local strategies refer to understanding specific linguistic units and include:

- Paraphrase
- Reread
- Question meaning of a clause or sentence
- Question meaning of a word
- Solve vocabulary problem

In addition to the local and general delineation, Block (1986) also saw strategies as being either extensive (understanding an author's ideas) or reflexive (reacting to those ideas personally). This division of strategies is helpful when considering critical reading strategies, as both extensive and reflexive modes are crucial for readers to be able to understand key concepts in a text, reflect on their own individual interpretation, and decide how to use a text. In summary, early investigations into the nature of EFL reading strategies focused on describing self-employed strategies by EFL and ESL learners, L1 transfer, students' cognitive processes and awareness of strategy use, and the effectiveness of teaching methods (Barnett, 1989, p. 70). The multiplicity of different strategies and the divergent views on their effectiveness means making a conclusive taxonomy of successful reading strategies is a challenging task.

As methods of instruction began to take a more coherent form, the evidence for giving explicit instruction in critical reading strategies grew more convincing. Carnine and Gersten (1984) asserted that critical reading involves complex cognitive processing and that instruction therefore needs to be overt and explicit, so that all the steps in the strategic process are clearly introduced and modeled by the teacher. Patching et al. (1983) continued with this approach by undertaking a study of overt, systematic instruction of the cognitive process involved in critical reading compared with a workbook based treatment group, similar to Wright's (1977) approach. Patching et al.'s (1983) results showed that explicit training by modeling overt reading strategies was significantly more successful than the workbook method or the control group. Day (1980) also found that explicit, guided training was necessary, particularly for lower-level learners. Brown, Campione and Day (1981) noted that for such learners mere training of such strategies was not sufficient and each step



should be explicitly introduced coupled with specific attention to self-management and control practices, that is, an explicit application of such strategies was necessary. From this research, it is evident that due to the cognitive complexity of critical reading strategies, explicit instruction for both NSs and NNSs alike is beneficial.

Although the explicit instruction method has proven merits in terms of students clearly understanding and successfully applying critical reading strategies, consideration must be given to how students retain and develop their skills autonomously over time. Guided practice of explicit reading strategies can be delivered via in-class activities and assignments but such overt instruction and guidance may not necessarily result in decontextualized skills that become internalized and then freely produced by students autonomously. Adams, Carnine and Gersten's (1982) study noted that after overt training, students would apply the principles in a covert and personalized way, in that they could identify faulty arguments in a passage but could not label them with the formal rules which were explained and modeled by the teacher. Simply replicating modeled instruction may not fully prepare students to handle new reading challenges adequately. Belenky and Nokes-Malach (2012) believe that teachers need to encourage interpretive knowledge whereby students can autonomously apply strategies to new texts, rather than simply replicating what they learned during guided practice sessions. The researchers note that if students can see the personal value in applying strategies in terms of furthering academic success and motivation is high, then a more independent and interpretive approach to reading can occur.

In addition to the need for more interpretive reading strategies, students must also exhibit integrative knowledge. Making connections across texts, and even subject areas, is a key skill for academic success. The efficacy of a text can only be assessed when integrated within a broader academic context. When students are responding to content, they can refer to previously encountered material in order to support or refute claims, evidence, and theories. Manarin et al. (2015, p. 53) found that integrated interdisciplinarity was not evident in students' reading logs even within multidisciplinary courses, and suggests that more needs to be done by college teachers to engender intertextual references and connections. The researchers note that instructions to make connections between texts needs to be explicit, otherwise students do not automatically make them. Thus for integrated knowledge, activities that require students to compare and contrast the content presented in a number of texts may be an effective approach. Given that writing about texts improves reading skills (Graham & Herbert, 2010), comparative writing assignments based on two or more readings may help address a lack of intertextual and interdisciplinary integration.

The importance of contextual strategies has been given varying levels of support from different academics as it helps readers develop a broader understanding of the author's motivations and values expressed in a text. Harnadek (1978, pp. 8-9) claims knowledge about the author, publisher, and the intended audience is relevant, whereas Kurland (1994, p. 59) argues for the primacy of content when ranking strategies. Making the observation that an analysis and interpretation should be based on the text itself, other than variables such as the publisher, which could publish on a range of views, are less relevant to the core meaning expressed in the text.



Nonetheless, advanced EFL students need to access the full range of strategies available to them to be able to fully analyze and evaluate a text. Ultimately, contextual strategies can give clues to the author's perspective that is not salient in the text. Researching about the author's background, their other works, and affiliations, can build a picture of their motivations. Locating a text in its socio-cultural and temporal context can allow students to understand why some viewpoints are maintained. Researching about the political leanings and financial backings that the institutions that produce texts have, may illuminate their motivations, bias, and the consolidation of power relations they purport. By casting a wider net of inquiry, a text can be placed in its social context, furthering students' appraisal of its quality and social worth.

Another strategy that is positively affected by guided instruction is the practice of reflection. Reflection helps students have more thoughtful engagement with texts after a deeper consideration of the issues that have been presented and their own reactions to those issues that have been expressed. Roskos, Vukelich, and Risko (2001) conducted a critical analysis of reflection research over a fifteen year period and found that a key issue surrounding this body of research was the importance of guided practice. The findings show that explicit instruction in the practice of reflection is the best method for promoting critical reading. The importance of providing specific content coupled with reflective question prompts that deepens students' critical analyses is also another key finding of the review. Another key point about reflection is that the more teachers practice reflection themselves, the more critical literacy is achieved within the classroom. The most striking example of this is Harste, Leland, and Youssef's (1997) study on encouraging reflection on school-based social inequities. Over a three semester period teachers-in-training engaged in journal writings and class discussions framed by an explicit focus on readings that covered such inequities. By making reflection a key focus of their training, Harste et al. (1997) found that the time teachers took for their own critical reflection paralleled the time taken for critical reflection by their own students.

Understanding how different cultures create and interpret texts is another element in reading more critically for both students and teachers alike. EFL teachers must engage in their own intercultural literacy processes to understand and help students from different cultural backgrounds. If teachers want to raise students' awareness of cultural differences in texts they must have already expanded their own knowledge about cultural differences across texts. For example, Clark and Medina's (2000) study showed that by writing about a variety of narratives from different backgrounds, prospective teachers increased their multicultural knowledge of texts and were able to view texts as being the product of social situations and interactions rather than standalone passages. Clark and Medina (2000) asked 60 teachers-in-training to read and discuss autobiographical narratives from differing cultural backgrounds and then write narratives about their own literacy development. Through this process the prospective teachers changed their view of literacy to see it as influenced by social interactions, multicultural perspectives, and they also recognized the importance of the students' own narratives. The study showed that reading narratives from differing cultures can help teachers break down cultural stereotypes and work better with texts and with

students from different cultural backgrounds. This supports the view that reading is social and interactive and highlights the need for more strategy instruction that attends to critical reading for social purposes.

Lastly, the typical student's motivation is geared towards high grades, and reviewing how assessments influence the reading of texts will help with student engagement when teaching critical reading strategies. By clearly explaining how the reading material and accompanying assignments attend to specific academic purposes, students will more likely pay careful attention to the goal of the reading strategy being taught. If students can clearly ascertain the specific reading purpose, they will have a much better chance at obtaining and internalizing the new skill. In short, it is evident that explicit instruction, by making the students aware of their learning, is a vital first step. Students need to see the value in learning strategies to maintain motivation, autonomous use, and retention. Teachers should also engage with their own critical reading practices to ensure their reading strategy instruction is culturally informed and given priority in the classroom.

#### **4. Purpose of Study**

In reflecting on the literature, it is apparent that understanding the type and frequency of reading strategies that students are using is an important first step in assessing their reading instruction needs. By clearly understanding how students are employing reading strategies, teachers can adjust their curriculum to attend to any reading strategy deficiencies. By extension, teachers for advanced EFL learners need to assess their students' mastery of critical reading strategies to ensure they are pursuing deeper and more informed reading. To explore this issue, a survey was conducted to report on the frequency of students' critical reading strategy use in order to clarify which strategies need more attention in the classroom. By questioning students about their frequency of reading strategy use, this study hopes to identify if critical strategies are utilized frequently in comparison to comprehension-based strategies. From the results of the survey, a diagnostic analysis and set of recommendations for attending to the most important and least utilized critical reading strategies is discussed. The research questions formulated were:

1. How often do advanced EFL college students use critical reading strategies compared to comprehension-based strategies?
2. Which critical reading strategies are used the most and which the least?

#### **5. Methodology**

To answer these questions a quantitative survey using the Likert five point frequency scale was carried out to assess students' self-perceived frequency of reading strategy use. A total of 31 students were asked by way of a paper-based written survey how often they used 20 different reading strategies. The participants' age range was 18-24 and they came from a diverse range of Asian nations, with a total of eight nationalities represented. Their vocabulary range was quite large, between 2199-12,458 word families, with a mean of 7300. The standard deviation was

3700 with a median of 5992 word families (Word Engine, 2016). With such a disparate range of vocabulary knowledge it was paramount that reading strategies accompanied vocabulary acquisition to guide the students with their readings, in order to meet the course objectives of evaluating the quality of arguments in non-fiction texts for use as evidence during the debates.

The reading strategies included in the survey were based on Mikulecky's (2008) list of key reading strategies synthesized from the latest findings on reading strategies for EFL learners. To assess the frequency of use of critical reading strategies in comparison to the use of comprehension-based strategies when reading English texts for their university subjects, 10 strategies that fall within Manarin et al.'s (2015, p. 5-6) criteria for critical reading skills were selected. The survey asked: *How often do you use the following reading strategies when reading texts for your university courses?* The participants chose from the answer options of almost always, often, sometimes, seldom, and never.

Table 1 details the reading strategy types that the participants were questioned about. In the survey the comprehension strategies and critical reading strategies were randomly ordered to ensure students responded to each item independently without the comprehension and critical strategy type delineation being made explicit to them. Although many researchers have employed think aloud protocols for data collection when analyzing strategy use, a Likert scale was used to specifically address the research questions about frequency of use. Each strategy was explained and examples were provided for strategies students requested further clarification of, to ensure they understood each item type. The survey was conducted in class time and had a 100 percent return rate. Descriptive statistics, rather than inferential statistics were used to analyze the preliminary results in this report.

Table 1  
*Survey Question Items Divided by Critical and Comprehension-Based Reading Strategies*

<b>Critical Reading Strategies</b>	<b>Comprehension-Based Reading Strategies</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Distinguish main and supporting ideas.</li> <li>2. Evaluate the credibility of the claims.</li> <li>3. Make relevant inferences about the text.</li> <li>4. Make judgments about how the text is argued.</li> <li>5. Question the author's assumptions.</li> <li>6. Decide how to use the text for your own study.</li> <li>7. Identify rhetorical devices.</li> <li>8. Identify power relations.</li> <li>9. Evaluate the quality of the text.</li> <li>10. Distinguish between fact and opinion.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Preview a text.</li> <li>2. Scan a text for specific information.</li> <li>3. Recognize topics in the text.</li> <li>4. Locate topic sentences.</li> <li>5. Guess the meaning of unknown words from the context.</li> <li>6. Skim a text for the overall idea.</li> <li>7. Paraphrase parts of a text in your own words.</li> <li>8. Read faster by reading phrases rather than single words.</li> <li>9. Reread a text for deeper understanding.</li> <li>10. Understanding the relationship of ideas by recognizing the structure of a text.</li> </ol>

## 6. Results

The survey results show that overall, comprehension-based reading strategies were more frequently used than critical reading strategies. Despite this, the participants reported they use critical reading strategies for their university reading materials, albeit significantly less than comprehension strategies. Figure 1 provides a snapshot of the difference in frequency use between the two strategy categories.

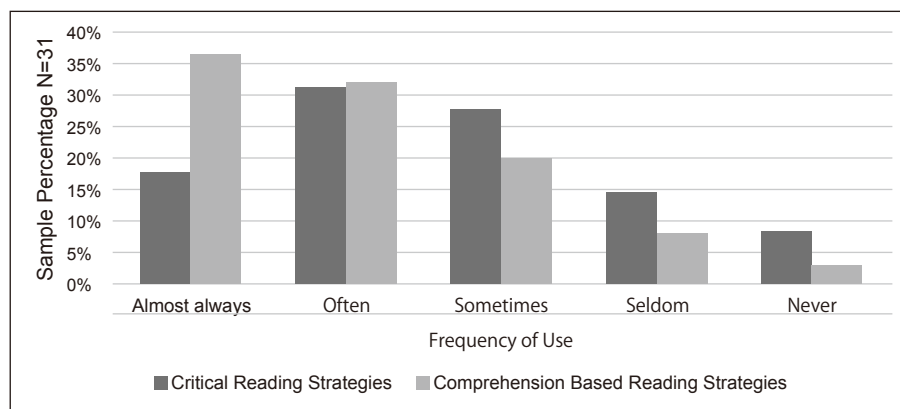


Figure 1. Critical vs. Comprehension-Based Reading Strategies Use

The participants almost always use comprehension strategies twice as much as they do critical reading strategies, 37% and 18% of the time respectively. Whilst this is a significant difference, the next category surprisingly received almost exactly the same number of responses, with 31% of respondents *often* using critical reading strategies. Nonetheless, in all of the most infrequent categories (*sometimes*, *seldom*, and *never*) critical reading strategies scored higher with a total of 51% (*sometimes*: 28%, *seldom*: 15%, *never*: 8%). Comprehension-based strategies only received a total of 31% for the three infrequent categories. Whilst it is encouraging that the *seldom* and *never* categories received relatively low scores of frequency use for critical strategies, it is clear that overall the comprehension-based strategies are used much more. This reflects the observation that comprehension-based strategies are more fundamental and precede, or underpin higher level critical reading strategies.

Figure 2 details the results for the top five most frequently used comprehension-based items. The items were ranked from most frequent to least by adding each item's totals for the three most frequent categories (*almost always*, *often*, and *sometimes*). The results show that rudimentary strategies such as skimming and scanning were routinely used which may reflect the retention of use from lower level courses. *Guess the meaning of unknown words also scored highly with the almost always and often categories receiving a total of 84%*. The items *recognize topics in the text* and *understanding the relationship of ideas by recognizing the structure of a text* also received high responses for the top two most frequent categories, both receiving a total of 81%. Figure 3 shows the comprehension-based reading strategies that received the lowest frequency of use from the

sample. The items *locate topic sentences* and *paraphrase parts of a text in your own words* had the lowest number of responses. It is interesting to note that *locating topic sentences* is not a priority for the participants even though it can be considered a fundamental reading strategy. The paraphrasing item may have received fewer responses due to its emphasis on student production and the time investment involved.

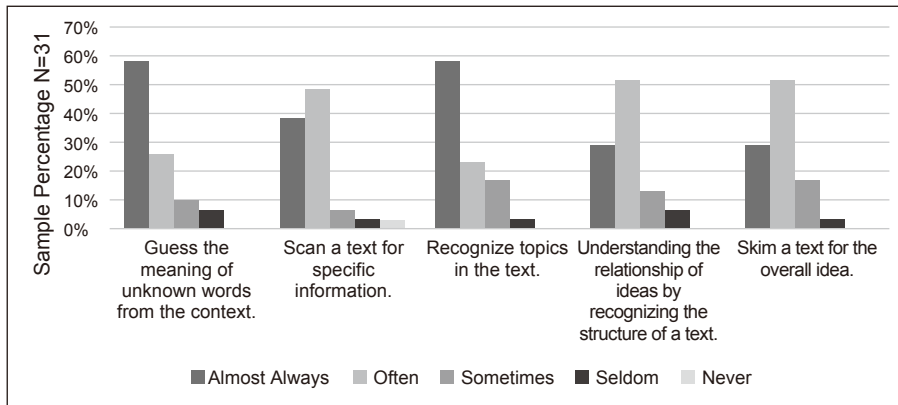


Figure 2. Most Frequent Comprehension-Based Reading Strategies

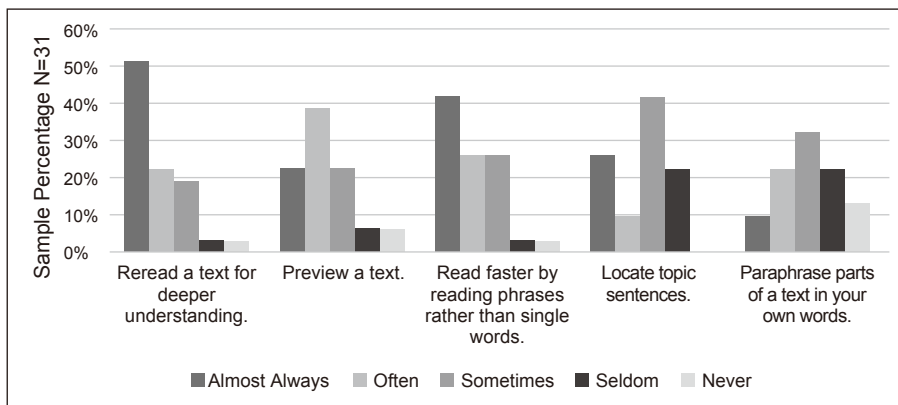


Figure 3. Least Frequent Comprehension-Based Reading Strategies

Figure 4 displays the results for the critical reading strategies identified as which respondents thought they used the most frequently, and Figure 5 displays the least utilized critical strategies. By combining the two most frequent categories of *almost always* and *often* some clear patterns emerge in terms of which particular critical reading strategies are used the most often with *distinguishing between main and supporting ideas* receiving a combined total of 78%. Next, a total of 71% of respondents *almost always* or *often* used the strategy of *deciding how to use the text for your own study*. The next two most frequently employed strategies were *make judgments about how the text is argued* and *evaluate the quality of the text*, which received 58% and 55% respectively. If the three most infrequent categories of *sometimes*, *seldom*, and *never* are combined, it is apparent that

the item *identify power relations* is the least used with a combined total of 70%. Three items all fell within the 50-60% range for the three most infrequent categories, namely, *identify rhetorical devices*: 58%, *distinguish between fact and opinion*: 55%, and *question the author's assumptions*: 55%.

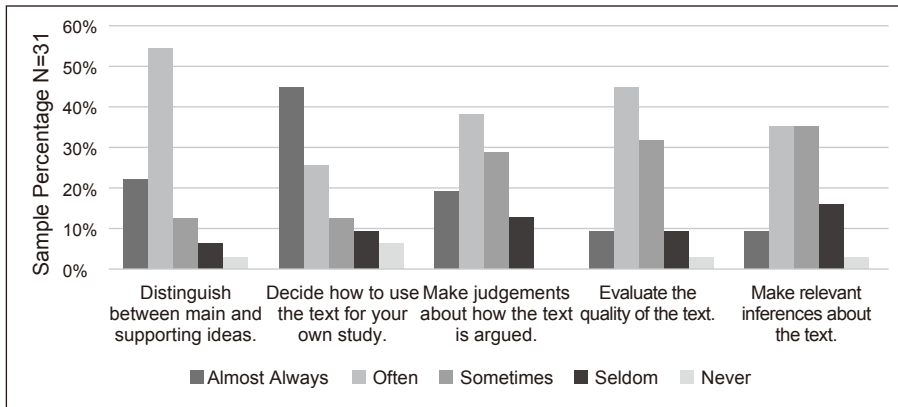


Figure 4. Most Frequent Critical Reading Strategies

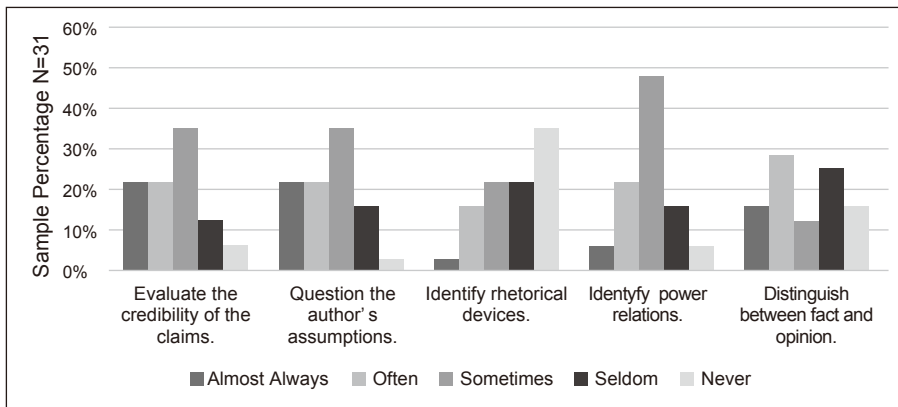


Figure 5. Least Frequent Critical Reading Strategies

## 7. Limitations

It must be acknowledged that the small sample size means the results may not be statistically significant. There was no specific control over the textual complexity in relation to the levels of the participants as the survey question asked about all texts the participants read for their university courses in general. It may also be the case that the complexity of these authentic texts are actually inhibiting the use of critical reading strategies as students lack the vocabulary and language familiarity to shift their cognitive resources beyond basic comprehension. An area of future research could be assessing if students implement critical strategies more frequently when texts are graded at an appropriate level. Another complication is the lack of a clear delineation between comprehension-based and critical reading strategies. It could be argued that the critical reading strategies discussed are

just a more advanced form of comprehension as opposed to being a distinct set of strategies. In terms of the participants' responses, there are inherent issues with self-perceived frequency use, as students' interpretations of the frequency categories may differ, and so too their responses. Furthermore, the high response rate for the *often* category could be attributed to participants seeing it as a default option if unconsidered answers were given.

## 8. Discussion

The results show that the participants in the sample use critical reading strategies less often than comprehension-based reading strategies. In fact, only two of the most frequent critical strategies (*distinguishing between main and supporting ideas* and *deciding how to use the text for your own study*) had comparable frequency use to any of the comprehension-based items. Furthermore, it can be argued that these two items are the least critical in terms of questioning the validity of an author's arguments. As mentioned in the results, the four items that do evaluate validity of arguments are used the least. For this particular sample it can be inferred that *identify power relations* and *rhetorical devices, distinguish between fact and opinion*, and *question the author's assumptions* are all strategies that students need more instruction and practice using.

The results indicate that in order for advanced EFL learners to extend their reading of texts beyond meaning comprehension, a greater focus on explicitly teaching critical reading strategies in the classroom is needed. The participants' previous English studies leading up to the advanced course may have placed a greater focus on comprehension, and the survey results reflect the retention of such strategies. Despite this, participants also reported using critical reading strategies more often than expected. For this sample population, it can be surmised that the degree of criticality of a reading strategy is a factor in its frequency of use. The items that demand student led evaluation of more abstract and ambiguous meanings, such as *identifying power relations*, were the most infrequent.

Combining the findings from the literature review and the survey, a practical template for teaching critical reading strategies can be formulated. A hierarchy of skills moving from meaning comprehension, through to critical analysis, and finally insightful commentary, can help students progress their understanding and interpretation of authentic texts. Given the high frequency of use for more rudimentary comprehension strategies, such as the item *guess the meaning of unknown words*, it is apparent that in an advanced EFL course, such strategies require less intensive instruction and practice. It is therefore recommended that a greater focus is placed on the critical items that students are less familiar with. For this sample, the strategy *identify rhetorical devices* was particularly low and instruction that clarifies what rhetorical devices are, and how to find and interpret them in texts, would help the students assess the purpose of differing discourse styles and techniques, such as hyperbole and sensationalism. Moreover, explicit instruction utilizing authentic examples of how texts are used to maintain power structures - for example, texts with implied sexism or racism - is another area students would benefit from. The third item that requires attention, *distinguish between fact and opinion*, is an essential research skill at the college level.



The line between fact and opinion is further blurred when approached in an L2 text, and EFL learners require specific instruction and practice at identifying language devices that give clues to factual inaccuracies, such as the selective use of quotes and ellipsis in media texts. Although the results may be statistically insignificant, the results indicate that attention to the critical reading strategies that are used the least would broaden this sample's critical reading strategy usage.

## 9. Conclusion

Whatever critical reading strategies teachers determine to be of the most importance, the literature shows that certain pedagogical methods hold empirical weight when introducing them in the classroom. In short, explicit modeling from the instructor is essential and dealing with one item at a time will reduce cognitive load. Conscious awareness on the learner's behalf will aid retention and explaining the real world value, coupled with adequate assessment weighting, will increase motivation. The literature reviewed also places importance on interpretive knowledge that is adaptable to a range of texts to engender autonomous replication. Attending to core skills, such as contextual clues and inference, will aid learners with lower vocabulary profiles and time for reflection will deepen productive response tasks and broaden cultural understanding and acceptance. Finally, balancing strategy instruction between reading for academic success and reading for social purposes will provide a balanced critical pedagogy. For example, the reading strategies of *distinguish between fact and opinion* and *make relevant inferences about a text*, fall more within the critical reading for academic success tradition, whereas *identifying rhetorical devices* and *power relations* can be categorized as critical reading strategies for social purposes.

In reflecting on EFL reading instruction practice, it can be argued that a focus on comprehension is perhaps too dominant when a more interactive and interpretive model is necessary to engender critical literacy for students entering advanced level study. In an age when fake news sways public opinion, it is essential that advanced EFL college students have the necessary tools to critique reading passages and identify high quality sources. This paper has sought to synthesize the literature on critical reading strategies and provide an example of students' self-perceived reading strategy use to inform a process of instruction in the classroom. Key strategies such as the ten critical reading strategies outlined in Table 1 should be introduced overtly and separately to ensure students have a full range of critical reading skills. Depending on the students' needs, the strategies that can be considered as requiring more critical engagement may need more time and practice for students to fully comprehend and use them autonomously. The results of the survey have clarified that although there is evidence of autonomous critical reading, more explicit instruction is necessary to ensure full coverage of the key critical reading strategies. It is the hope of the author that the research presented in this article may help teachers evaluate and refine their own reading instruction to ensure that a more critical appraisal of sources can be undertaken by students at higher levels of proficiency to ensure they can read for academic success and social purposes.

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Appendix: Survey Questionnaire

*How often do you use the following reading strategies when reading texts for your university courses?*

**Reading strategies**

Distinguish between main and supporting ideas. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never	evaluate the credibility of the claims. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never
Preview a text. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never	Paraphrase parts of a text in your own words. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never
Scan a text for specific information. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never	Make relevant inferences (conclusions) about the text. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never
Make judgments about how the text is argued. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never	Recognize topics in the text. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never
Locate topic sentences. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never	Question the author's assumptions. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never
Decide how to use the text for your own study. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never	Guess the meaning of unknown words from the context. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never
Skim a text for the overall idea. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never	Identify rhetorical devices. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never
Identify power relations. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never	Evaluate the quality of the text. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never
Distinguish between fact and opinion. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never	Read faster by reading phrases rather than single words. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never
Reread a text for deeper understanding. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never	Understand the relationship of ideas by recognizing the structure of a text. <input type="radio"/> Almost Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Seldom <input type="radio"/> Never