CHAPTER – 3

STEPS TO IMPROVE READING

1. Introduction

John Langan’s Ten Steps to Improving College Reading Skills, Third Edition. Townsend Press: US, 1997, presents a sequence of ten reading skills that are widely recognized as essential for basic and advanced comprehension. The first six skills concern the more literal levels of comprehension:

- Using vocabulary in context
- Recognizing main ideas
- Identifying supporting details
- Recognizing implied main ideas and the central point
- Understanding relationships that involve addition and time
- Understanding relationships that involve examples, comparison or contrast, and cause and effect

The remaining skills cover the more advanced, critical levels of comprehension:

- Distinguishing between facts and opinions
- Making inferences
- Understanding purpose and tone
- Evaluating arguments.

The book explains in a clear, step-by-step way the essential elements of each skill. The focus is on teaching the skills.
1.1. Using Vocabulary in Context

“Context clues are words and phrases in a sentence which help you reason out the meaning of an unfamiliar word. Oftentimes you can figure out the meanings of new or unfamiliar vocabulary by paying attention to the surrounding language” (Steeuben, 2005). There are four common types of common clues: Examples, Synonyms, Antonyms, and General sense of the sentence or passage. In addition to context clues are word parts: prefixes, roots and suffixes.

Context clues are words and phrases in a sentence which help you reason out the meaning of an unfamiliar word. Oftentimes you can figure out the meanings of new or unfamiliar vocabulary by paying attention to the surrounding language. According to John Langan (p. 10), using context clues to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words will help you in several ways:

- It will save you time when reading. You will not have to stop to look up words in the dictionary.
- After you figure out the meaning of the same word more than once through its context, it may become a part of your working vocabulary. You will therefore add to your vocabulary simply by reading thoughtfully.
- You will get a sense of how a word is actually used including its shades of meaning.

Types of Context Clues (John Langan, p. 10)

There are four common types of common clues:

- Examples
- Synonyms
- Antonyms
- General sense of the sentence or passage

Steuben (2005) gives the table below to explain the types of clues, their signals and examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Context Clue</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Signals</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition or Example Clue</td>
<td>Phrases or words that define or explain</td>
<td>is defined as, means, the term, [a term in boldface or italics] set off with commas</td>
<td>Sedentary individuals, people who are not very active, often have diminished health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restatement or Synonym Clue</td>
<td>Another word or phrase with the same or a similar meaning is used.</td>
<td>in other word, that is, also known as, sometimes called, or</td>
<td>The dromedary, commonly called a camel, stores fat in its hump.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonym or Contrast Clue</td>
<td>Phrases or words that indicate opposite</td>
<td>but, in contrast, however, instead of, unlike, yet</td>
<td>Unlike his quiet and low key family, Brad is garrulous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Knowledge</td>
<td>The meaning is derived from the experience and background</td>
<td>the information may be something basically familiar to you</td>
<td>Lourdes is always sucking up to the boss, even in front of others. That</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
knowledge of the reader; "common sense" and logic.

Table 2 - Types of Context clues

In addition to context clues are word parts: prefixes, roots and suffixes. Some textbooks refer to this as word analysis. These come into the English language from several other languages, and many of the oldest are Greek or Latin in origin.

1.1.1. Text Book Definitions

Langan says that you don’t always have to use context clues or the dictionary to find definitions. Very often, textbook authors provide definitions of important terms. Also, after giving a definition, authors usually follow it with one or more examples to ensure that you understand the word being defined.

Text book authors, then, often do more than provide context clues: they define a word and provide examples as well. When they take the time to define and illustrate a word, you should assume that the term is important enough to learn.

1.2. Recognizing Main Ideas

It is important to find main ideas when reading. Main ideas help readers remember important information. The main idea of a paragraph is the point of the passage, or the point the author is making about a topic, minus all the details. More than any other skill, the key to good comprehension is recognizing main ideas. When
The main idea of a paragraph tells the topic of the paragraph. The topic tells what all or most of the sentences are about. The main idea is like an umbrella. It is the author’s primary point about a topic, under which fits all the other material of the paragraph.

### 1.2.1. Identifying the main idea

It may be helpful to first explain what the main idea is not. It is not the information obtained during the introduction to the text when the title, headings, illustrations etc. are briefly considered, and linked to background knowledge, prior to reading. Although these text features are often useful in scaffolding readers towards finding the main idea, on their own, they are not enough. Readers need to explore the text at a deeper level in order to confirm or put aside any tentative thoughts about the main idea that the text introduction may prompt.

It is also important to note that the main idea is not simply what the text is about. To paraphrase Gerald Duffy (2003), "Charlotte's Web" is a story about a spider called Charlotte and a pig called Wilbur, but the main idea is more to do with the things that
give life meaning: friendship, love, birth and death. The main idea then, is what the author wants readers to understand is important and valued in the text, i.e., across the whole text, not just within sections of it.

Because the main idea is hardly ever explicitly stated by the author, and because readers can't get inside the author's head to find out exactly what they want readers to understand is important and valued in the text, readers can only ever make an informed guess about what the main idea is. Consequently, readers often disagree about the main idea. Any disagreement is best seen as a valuable opportunity for discussion (nzer.org)

1.2.2. **How then do you find the main idea?**

When determining the main idea the reader uses text details, in conjunction with their prior knowledge, to think about what the main message of the text might be. As they read, they begin to tentatively group related details, constantly asking themselves where the author is placing emphasis or value. At various stages throughout the reading the reader may decide to reject very small groups of related details as not being particularly valued by the author. However, as they read on, gathering and grouping more details, they may reverse such a decision. Finally, the reader combines all the evidence, including their prior knowledge, and decides what is most important and valued in the text.
1. Identify the important information.

2. Group the important information.

3. Combine the groups to get the main idea.

Table 3 – Steps to find the Main idea

1.2.3. **Steps in Reading to Find the Main Idea**

The following steps suggested by teacherweb.com (2012) can be used to find the main idea:

1.2.3.1. **Preview**

Look for meaning clues in introductions, titles, chapter headings, subheadings, bold words, boxed information, pictures, charts, and graphs. This will help you discover the topic being discussed (what the writing is about), the author's "slant" or perspective on the topic how the material is organized, and what's more and less important. During previewing you may also form questions about the topic. Having questions in mind as you read will help you establish a purpose for reading, and you will be more involved as you read, which will help you absorb new information.

1.2.3.2. **Read**

Read the entire text, looking for the general idea or ideas being presented. Re-read to find and highlight key words and concepts.
1.2.3.3. **Focus**

Focus on individual paragraphs within the text, starting at the beginning. Generally, each paragraph in a piece of writing about a topic is a group of sentences dealing with one idea related to that topic. The following steps will help you find the main idea in a paragraph, the particular point the author is trying to make about the topic.

1.2.3.4. **Look for transition words**

Words and phrases such as "thus," "first," "next," "however," and "in addition," often indicate shifts in thought and signal the presence of examples and supporting details.

1.2.3.5. **Identify the most general statement**

Sometimes the main idea of a paragraph is directly stated in a sentence, called the topic sentence of the paragraph. Although it is often found at the beginning or end, the topic sentence can be found anywhere in the paragraph. It is typically the most general sentence, and the remaining sentences provide specific evidence and discussion to "back up" the main idea expressed in the topic sentence.

1.2.3.6. **Look for supporting evidence and discussion**

Sometimes the main idea is not directly stated in one sentence but is implied or suggested by all of the sentences in the paragraph. In this case, the reader must provide the main idea by considering all of the support--the examples, details, facts, etc.--and discussion about the topic provided by the writer. The main idea will be a general statement which incorporates the information presented by all of the sentences in the paragraph.
1.3. Identifying Supporting Details

The main idea is the umbrella statement covering all of the other material in a paragraph – examples, reasons, facts, and other specific details (John Langan, p. 79). All of those specific details are also called supporting details – they are the information that backs up and explains the main idea. There are two kinds of supporting details – major and minor. The major details are the primary points that support the main idea. Paragraphs usually contain minor details as well. While the major details explain and develop the main idea, they, in turn, are expanded upon by the minor details.

Supporting details contain the evidence to prove that the main idea is true and correct. Supporting details often contain dates, numbers, or percentages. Usually a paragraph contains two to three major details, as well as minor details. Supporting details provide the information that supports the topic sentence in a paragraph. You can create supporting details with descriptions, examples, reasons, explanations, and comparisons.

The supporting details give more information about the topic. They are not as general as the main idea. Instead, they help the reader understand more about the main idea.

A typical paragraph is organized like this:

I. The Main Idea Sentence:
   A. Supporting Detail
   B. Supporting Detail
   C. Supporting Detail

II. Concluding (or Summary) Sentence
1.3.1. What Sort of Details?

The details you use to support your topic sentences depend somewhat on the development strategy (persuasive, compare/contrast, narrative, expository, etc.) you're using. Are you writing a narrative or descriptive essay? Make your paragraphs come alive with details. An argumentation essay? Use plenty of facts and evidence. You may end up combining several of the following types of supporting details:

1.3.2. Description

Descriptive details will expand on the main idea in your topic sentence. Describe the colors, smells, textures and size of things. If your topic sentence claims that a fire was particularly damaging, you would include the color and size of the flames and the smoke, the smell of burning materials, etc. Description can include emotional details as well. Describe your feelings or the feelings others described.

1.3.3. Examples

Examples support topic sentences like evidence supports an argument. If you say that your car is in disrepair, give some examples. Is the engine barely running? Does it burn oil? Or, are you referring to the interior with exposed springs? Examples can also be shown with an anecdote, which are brief stories that illustrate the main idea in your topic sentence.

1.3.4. Compare/Contrast

Let's say you're writing a compare/contrast essay about two brands of e-book readers. If your topic sentence says that one has an easy-to-read home page, you might discuss the font sizes and screen colors, and follow with what's lacking on the other
brand's home page. If your topic sentence states that they're similar in many ways, be sure to show the 'many' ways, not just one or two.

1.3.5. Reasons

Use reasons to support your opinions. If your main idea is about places to do homework, and you have a topic sentence stating that you feel comfortable in a particular coffee shop, include the reasons. Is it the lighting? The music? Also, if you dislike something, be prepared to include the reasons if you want your claim to be effective.

1.3.6. Explanations

Explanations focus on clarifying an idea for readers who are unfamiliar with the topic. For example, if your topic is about taxes, and your topic sentence is about tax increment financing, you would include an explanation of what that is.

1.3.7. Describing Facts and Evidence

Describe a problem or an idea that you've stated in your topic sentence. If, for example, you're writing a persuasive essay about green energy, a topic sentence might state a problem that a lot of people have with it. You would then describe the problem and provide facts to support it, or you could counter with evidence that shows how the problem can be solved.

1.3.8. Connect to the Topic Sentence

All the supporting details should relate closely to the topic sentence, and generally to the main topic of your essay. For example, if your topic is gun control, all paragraphs should focus on some element of gun control, and nothing else. If you have trouble staying focused you can easily plan your paragraphs by writing out your topic sentence,
and adding the supporting details in a list. When you get to the draft stage, you can form sentences from the details you've got in the list.

1.4. Recognizing Implied Main Ideas and the Central Point

Authors often imply, or suggest, a main idea without stating it clearly in one sentence. In such cases, the reader must figure out that main idea by considering the supporting details. A selection consisting of several paragraphs or more has an overall main idea called the central point, or thesis. The paragraphs that make up the selection provide the supporting points and details for that central point. As with the main idea of a paragraph, the central point may be either clearly stated or implied. Sometimes a selection lacks a topic sentence, but that does not mean it lacks a main idea. You must figure out what that implied main idea is by deciding upon the point of all the details. The implied main idea of a paragraph will be a general statement that covers all or most of the specific ideas in a paragraph. It should not be too broad or too narrow.

1.4.1. Putting Implied Main Ideas into Words

When you read you often have to infer – figure out on your own – an author’s unstated main idea. The implied main idea that you come up with should cover all or most of the details in the paragraph.

1.4.2. Central points

Just as a paragraph has a main idea, so a longer selection has a central idea or central point, also known as thesis. The longer selection may be in the form of an essay, an article, or even a section within a text book chapter. The central point may be clearly stated, or it may be implied. You can find a central point in the same way that you find a
main idea – by considering the supporting material. The paragraph within the longer reading will provide supporting points and details for the central point.

Ezlearn (2012) opines that sometimes, a reader will get lucky and the main idea will be a stated main idea, where the main idea is easy to find because it's written directly in the text. However, many of the passages you'll read on a standardized test like the SAT or GRE will have an implied main idea, which is a little trickier. If the author doesn't directly state the main idea of the text, it's up to you to infer what the main idea is.

Finding the implied main idea is easier if you think of the passage as a box. Inside the box, is a random group of stuff (the details of the passage). Pull each item from the box and try to figure out what they each have in common, kind of like the game Tri-Bond. Once you've figured out what the common bond is among each of the items, you'll be able to summarize the passage in a snap.

Ezlearn (2012) suggests the following steps to find the implied main idea:

1. Read the passage of text
2. Ask this question to yourself: "What do each of the details of the passage have in common?"
3. In your own words, find the common bond among all the details of the passage and the author's point about this bond.
4. Compose a short sentence stating the bond and what the author says about the bond.

1.4.3. **Read the Implied Main Idea Example**

When you're with your friends, it's okay to be loud and use slang. They'll expect it and they aren't grading you on your grammar. When you're standing in a boardroom or sitting for an interview, you should use your best English possible, and keep your tone...
suitable to the working environment. Try to gauge the personality of the interviewer and
the setting of the workplace before cracking jokes or speaking out of turn. If you're ever
in a position to speak publicly, always ask about your audience, and modify your
language, tone, pitch and topic based on what you think the audience's preferences would
be. You'd never give a lecture about atoms to third-graders!

1.4.4. **What's the Common Thread?**

In this case, the author is writing about hanging out with friends, going on an
interview, and speaking publicly, which, at first glance, don't seem to relate to each other
that much. If you find a common bond among all them, though, you'll see that the author
is giving you different situations and then telling us to speak differently in each setting
(use slang with friends, be respectful and quiet in an interview, modify your tone
publicly). The common bond is speaking, which will have to be part of the implied main
idea.

1.4.5. **Summarize the Passage**

A sentence like "Different situations requires different kinds of speech" would fit
perfectly as the implied main idea of that passage. We had to infer that because the
sentence doesn't appear anywhere in the paragraph. But it was easy enough to find this
implied main idea when you looked at the common bond uniting each idea.

1.5. **Understanding Relationships that involve addition and time**

Authors use two common methods to show relationships and make their ideas
clear. The two methods are transitions and patterns of organization. Transitions are words
or phrases that show the relationships between ideas. They are like signs on the road that
guide travelers. Definition and example pattern of organization includes just what its
name suggests: a definition and one or more examples. Comparison words signal that authors are pointing out similarities between subjects. A comparison word tells us that a second idea is like the first one in some way. Information that falls into a cause-effect pattern addresses itself to the questions “Why does an event happen?” and “What are the results of an event?” In other words, this pattern answers the question “What are the causes and/or effects of an event?”

1.5.1. Transitions

Two major types of transitions are words that show addition and words that show time.

1.5.1.1. Additional Words

Additional words tell you that writers are adding to their thoughts. They are presenting one or more ideas that continue along the same line of thought as a previous idea. Like all transitions, addition words help writers organize their information and present it clearly to readers.

1.5.1.2. Helpful Points about Transitions

Here are two points to keep in mind about transitions:

1. Some transition words have the same meaning. For example, ‘also’, ‘moreover’, and ‘furthermore’ all mean “in addition”. Authors typically use a variety of transitions to avoid repetition.

2. In some cases the same word can serve as two different types of transitions, depending on how it is used. For example, the word ‘first’ may be used as an addition word to show that the author is continuing a train of thought. ‘First’ may also be used to signal a time sequence.
1.5.2. Patterns of Organization

Just as transitions can show the relationships between ideas in sentences, patterns of organization can show the relationships between supporting ideas in paragraphs, essays, or textbook chapters. Such patterns of organization help authors present their supporting material in a clearly organized way. By recognizing the patterns of organization that authors use to arrange information, you will be better able to understand and remember what you read.

Two major patterns of organization are the list of items pattern and the time order pattern. Addition words are often used in the list of items pattern, and time words are used in the time order pattern. Noting the transitions in a passage can help you become aware of the patterns of organization being used. Transitions can also help you find the major supporting details.

1.5.2.1. The List of Items Pattern

A list of items refers to a series of reasons, examples, or other points that support an idea. The items are listed in the order the author prefers. Addition words are often used in a list of items to tell us that another supporting point is being added to one or more points already mentioned. Textbook authors frequently organize material into lists of items, such as a list of types of economic systems, symptoms of heart disease, or reasons for teenage drinking.

1.5.3. Understanding Relationships that involve examples, comparison or contrast

Three other types of relationships:

- Relationships that involve examples
• Relationships that involve comparison and/or contrast
• Relationships that involve cause and effect

1.5.3.1. Relationships that involve examples

Example words indicate that an author will provide one or more examples to develop and clarify a given idea.

Words that show examples:

- for example
- for instance
- to illustrate
- including
- such as
- once

1.5.3.2. Comparison and Contrast

Comparison words signal that authors are pointing out similarities between subjects. A comparison word tells us that a second idea is like the first one in some way.

1.5.3.3. Words that show comparison

- As
- alike
- in a similar manner
- Just as
- in like manner
- in the same way
- Just like
- similar(ly)
- resemble

Contrast words show that things differ in one or more ways.

- But
- instead
- still
- even though
- Yet
- in contrast
- as opposed to
- different
- However
- on the other hand
- in spite of
- differs from
- Although
- on the contrary
- despite
- unlike
- Nevertheless
- converse(ly)
- rather than
- while
The comparison-contrast pattern shows how two things are alike or how they are different, or both. When things are compared their similarities are pointed out; when they are contrasted, their differences are discussed.

1.5.4. **Cause and Effect**

Cause and effect words signal that the author is explaining the reason why some thing happened or will happen.

Words that show cause and effect:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Therefore</th>
<th>so</th>
<th>result</th>
<th>because (of)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thus</td>
<td>as a result</td>
<td>effect</td>
<td>reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a consequence</td>
<td>results in</td>
<td>cause</td>
<td>explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequently</td>
<td>leads to</td>
<td>if …. Then</td>
<td>accordingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to</td>
<td>since</td>
<td>affect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.6. **Distinguishing between Facts and Opinions**

“Because writers don't always say things directly, sometimes it is difficult to figure out what a writer really means or what he or she is really trying to say. You need to learn to ‘read between the lines’ - to take the information the writer gives you and figure things out for yourself” (esl, 2011).

When most speakers and writers communicate, they include their opinions of a subject. What they say is therefore at least partly biased.

While bias is often unavoidable, many writers do try to remain as objective as possible. News articles and scientific reports are examples of writing in which authors try to be as factual as they can. However, opinions are central to other types of materials
such as editorials, political speeches, and advertisements. Writers of these materials try to persuade readers who have different viewpoints to change their minds.

You will also need to learn to distinguish between fact and opinion. Writers often tell us what they think or how they feel, but they don't always give us the facts. It's important to be able to interpret what the writer is saying so you can form opinions of your own. As you read an author's views, you should ask yourself if the author is presenting you with an established fact or with a personal opinion. Since the two may appear close together, even in the same sentence, you have to be able to distinguish between them (esl.com, 2011).

Both facts and opinions can be valuable to readers, but knowing the difference between the two is important in evaluating what is read. A fact is information that can be proved true through objective evidence. This evidence may be physical proof or the spoken or written testimony of witnesses. An opinion is a belief, judgment, or conclusion that cannot be objectively proved true. As a result, it is open to question.

The key difference between facts and opinions is that facts can be verified, or checked for accuracy, by anyone. In contrast, opinions cannot be checked for accuracy by some outside source. Opinions are what someone personally thinks or how he/she feel about an issue. Opinions by definition are subjective and relative. Sorting out facts from opinions we do always, perhaps without even realizing it (esl.com, 2011).

1.6.1. Fact

A fact is information that can be proved true through objective evidence. This evidence may be physical proof or the spoken or written testimony of witnesses.
Facts can be proven with evidence or observation

Facts can be based on experience

Facts are specific and certain

1.6.1.1.  Defining a Fact

Facts are objective, concrete bits of information. They can be found in official government and legal records, and in the physical sciences. Facts can be found in reference books, such as encyclopedias and atlases, textbooks, and relevant publications. Objective facts are what researchers seek in laboratories or through controlled studies. Facts are usually expressed by precise numbers or quantities, in weights and measures, and in concrete language. The decisions of Congress, specific technological data, birth records, historical documents, all provide researchers with reliable facts.

Since anyone can look up facts, facts are generally not the subject of disputes. However, not all facts are absolutes. Often the problem is that facts are simply not readily available - such as battles like the Little/Big Horn where all the witnesses who could give information on what happened died in the disaster (esl.com, 2011).

In 1876, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his 7th Cavalry engaged in a fight with Sioux Indians along the Little/Big Horn Rivers in Montana. Custer and his entire company were wiped out; no one survived to tell what really happened.

In this instance, we can only read opinions on how this disaster befell Custer.

To sum up, facts

• can be verified in reference books, official records, and so forth.
• are expressed in concrete language or specific numbers.
• once verified, are generally agreed upon by people (esl.com, 2011).

1.6.2. Opinion

An opinion is a belief, judgment, or conclusion that cannot be objectively proved true. As a result it is open to question.

Opinions demonstrate thoughts, opinions and feelings of people

Opinions vary between people

Opinions do not rely on evidence (John Langan, p. 222)

1.6.3. Other points about Fact and Opinion

There are several added points to keep in mind when separating fact from opinion.

1. Statements of fact may be found to be untrue.

2. Opinions may be marked as facts

3. Remember that value words often represent opinions.

Value words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best</th>
<th>great</th>
<th>beautiful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>terrible</td>
<td>bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better</td>
<td>lovely</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td>disgusting</td>
<td>wonderful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Value words often express judgments – they are generally subjective, not objective. While factual statements report on observed reality, subjective statements interpret reality.
4. The words ‘should’ and ‘ought to’ often signal opinions. Those words introduce what people think should, or ought to be done. Other people will think other things ought to be done.

5. Finally remember that much of what we read and hear is a mixture of fact and opinion.

Recognizing facts and opinion is important because much information that sounds factual is really opinion.

1.6.4. Facts and Opinions in Passages

According to John Langan, (p. 229), people tend to accept what they read as fact, but much of what is written is actually opinion. Keeping an eye out for opinion will help you to think for yourself and to question what you read.

There is sometimes a merging between facts and opinions. For example, if a research study demonstrates that most Australians believe that the moon is made of cheese, does this mean it is a fact that the moon is made of cheese? Of course not. But can we say it is a fact that most Australians believe the moon is made of cheese? This, too, may not be a fact, because the study itself may be badly designed, wrongly interpreted or badly written. The only fact in this example is that a particular research study has reported that most Australians believe the moon is made of cheese. Everything else at this stage is simply guessing or giving opinion.

However, unless we find evidence for every statement that is ever made, we have to take certain statements as factual. This is why skill is required in distinguishing fact from opinion.
1.6.5. Determining an Opinion

Opinions are based on subjective judgment and personal values rather than on information that can be verified. An opinion is a belief that someone holds without complete proof or positive knowledge that it is correct. Even experts who have studied the same issue carefully often have very different opinions about that issue.

Opinions are often disputed, and many times involve abstract concepts and complex moral issues such as right or wrong, fairness and loyalty. Abstract concepts, because they are not easily understood, can never be defined to everyone's satisfaction. For example, each of us holds a personal opinion about what fairness or loyalty is, about gun control and abortion, and these issues always remain a matter of opinion, not fact (esl.com, 2011).

Although opinions cannot be verified for accuracy, writers should, nevertheless, back their opinions with evidence, facts, and reason - by whatever information supports the opinion and convinces the reader that it is a valid opinion. A valid opinion is one in which the writer's support for his or her opinion is solid and persuasive, and one in which the writer cites other respected authorities who are in agreement. If a writer presents an extreme or unconvincing opinion, the reader should remain wary or unconvinced.

Writers often slip their personal opinions into a piece of writing, even when it is suppose to be a "factual" account; alert readers can identify subjective opinions by studying the writer's language.

- Opinions are often expressed as comparisons (more, strongest, less, most, least efficient, but):
The painter Pablo Picasso was far more innovative than any of his contemporaries.

- Opinions are often expressed by adjectives (brilliant, vindictive, fair, trustworthy):

Ronald Reagan was a convincing speaker when he read a prepared address but was not effective at press conferences.

- Opinions often involve evaluations:

The excellence of her science project was a model for other students.

- Opinions are often introduced by verbs and adverbs that suggest some doubt in the writer's mind:

  It appears she was confused.

  She seems to have the qualifications for the position.

  They probably used dirty tricks to win (esl, 2011).

Some opinions obviously deserve more attention than others do. When expert economists, such as John Kenneth Galbraith or Paul Volcher, discuss the U.S. economy, their opinions are more informed and therefore more reliable than the opinions of people who know very little about economic policy. Similarly, when someone is a specialist on the poet John Keats, that person's opinion of Keat's poems should be given considerable weight.

Become an alert and critical reader. Understand the differences between facts and opinions, and interpret and apply both into your critical thinking.

- An author’s ‘point of view’ refers to his or her position on an issue or, in other words, the author’s opinion or belief regarding an issue.

- Authors may have conflicting points of view (opinions) about controversial issues.
• When authors favor one side of an issue, they are said to have a *bias* in favor of that side of the issue.

• Authors may be unbiased/neutral or objective (sanchezelass, 2010).

1.7. **Making Inferences**

John Langan, (p. 253) explains that when we read between the lines, we pick up ideas that are not directly stated in what we are reading. These implied ideas are often important for a full understanding of what an author means. Discovering the ideas in writing that are not stated directly is called making inferences, or drawing conclusions.

1.7.1. **Inferences in reading**

In reading, we make logical leaps from the information given in a straightforward way to ideas that are not stated directly. To draw inferences, we use all the clues provided by the writer, our own experience, and logic.

Students have already practiced making inferences in the tasks “Vocabulary in Context”. There they had to use context clues within sentences to infer the meanings of words. Also, in the tasks “Implied Main Ideas and the Central Point”, they had to read between the lines in order to find implied main ideas. The focus of this task “Reading to get the Inference” is to broaden their ability to make inferences about what they read.

3.7.1.1. **Guidelines for Inferences in Reading**

a) Never lose sight of the available information.

b) Use your background information and experience to help you in making inferences

c) Consider the alternatives
1.7.2. Inferences in Literature

Inference is very important in reading literature. While writers of factual material usually state directly much of what they mean, creative writers provide verbal pictures that show what they mean. It is up to the reader to infer the point of what the creative writer has said.

Applying inference skills can increase your appreciation of literary forms – novels, short stories, plays, essays, autobiographies, and poetry. Poetry, especially, by its nature implies much of its meanings. Implications are often made through comparisons.

Inference is just a big word that means a conclusion or judgment. If you infer that something has happened, you do not see, hear, feel, smell, or taste the actual event. But from what you know, it makes sense to think that it has happened. You make inferences everyday. Most of the time you do so without thinking about it. Suppose you are sitting in your car stopped at a red signal light. You hear screeching tires, then a loud crash and breaking glass. You see nothing, but you infer that there has been a car accident. We all know the sounds of screeching tires and a crash. We know that these sounds almost always mean a car accident. But there could be some other reason, and therefore another explanation, for the sounds. Perhaps it was not an accident involving two moving vehicles. Maybe an angry driver rammed a parked car. Or maybe someone played the sound of a car crash from a recording. Making inferences means choosing the most likely explanation from the facts at hand (academic.cuesta.edu, 2004).

There are several ways to help you draw conclusions from what an author may be implying. The following suggested by academic.cuesta.edu are descriptions of the various ways to aid you in reaching a conclusion.
1.7.3. **General Sense**

The meaning of a word may be implied by the general sense of its context, as the meaning of the word ‘incarcerated’ is implied in the following sentence:

‘Murderers are usually incarcerated for longer periods of time than robbers’.

You may infer the meaning of ‘incarcerated’ by answering the question "What usually happens to those found guilty of murder or robbery?" Use the text box below to write down what you have inferred as the meaning of the word ‘incarcerated’.

If you answered that they are locked up in jail, prison, or a penitentiary, you correctly inferred the meaning of incarcerated.

1.7.4. **Examples**

When the meaning of the word is not implied by the general sense of its context, it may be implied by examples. For instance,

Those who enjoy belonging to clubs, going to parties, and inviting friends often to their homes for dinner are gregarious.

You may infer the meaning of gregarious by answering the question "What word or words describe people who belong to clubs, go to parties a lot, and often invite friends over to their homes for dinner?" Use the lines below to write down what you have inferred as the meaning of the word gregarious.

If you wrote social or something like: "people who enjoy the company of others", you correctly inferred the meaning of gregarious.
1.7.5. Antonyms and Contrasts

When the meaning of a word is not implied by the general sense of its context or by examples, it may be implied by an antonym or by a contrasting thought in a context. Antonyms are words that have opposite meanings, such as happy and sad. For instance, Ben is fearless, but his brother is timorous.

You may infer the meaning of timorous by answering the question "If Ben is fearless and Jim is very different from Ben with regard to fear, then what word describes Jim?" Write your answer on the following line.

If you wrote a word such as timid, or afraid, or fearful, you inferred the meaning of timorous.

A contrast in the following sentence implies the meaning of credence:

Dad gave credence to my story, but Mom's reaction was one of total disbelief.

You may infer the meaning of credence by answering the question "If Mom's reaction was disbelief and Dad's reaction was very different from Mom's, what was Dad's reaction?" Write your answer on the following lines.

If you wrote that Dad believed the story, you correctly inferred the meaning of credence; it means "belief."

1.7.6. Be Careful of the Meaning You Infer

When a sentence contains an unfamiliar word, it is sometimes possible to infer the general meaning of the sentence without inferring the exact meaning of the unknown word. For instance, “When we invite the Paulsons for dinner, they never invite us to their home for a meal; however, when we have the Browns to dinner, they always reciprocate”. In reading this sentence some students infer that the Browns are more
desirable dinner guests than the Paulsons without inferring the exact meaning of reciprocate. Other students conclude that the Browns differ from the Paulsons in that they do something in return when they are invited for dinner; these students conclude correctly that reciprocate means "to do something in return."

In drawing conclusions (making inferences), you are really getting at the ultimate meaning of things - what is important, why it is important, how one event influences another, how one happening leads to another. Simply getting the facts in reading is not enough - you must think about what those facts mean to you (academic.cuesta.edu, 2004)

**1.8. Understanding Purpose**

Authors sometimes state their purpose. Sometimes they do not. An important part of reading critically is realizing that behind everything you read is an author. This author is a person who has a reason for writing a given piece and who works from a personal point of view. To fully understand and evaluate what you read, you must recognize ‘purpose’ – the reason why the author writes. Authors write with a reason in mind, and you can better evaluate what is being said by determining what that reason is. The author’s reason for writing is also called the purpose of a selection. Three common purposes are as follows: (John Langan, p. 289)

1.8.1. **To inform:** to give information about a subject. Authors with this purpose wish to provide facts that will explain or teach something to readers.

1.8.2. **To persuade:** to convince the reader to agree with the author’s point of view on a subject, or to convince the readers to do or believe something. Authors
with this purpose may give facts, but their main goal is to argue or prove a point to readers.

3.8.3. **To entertain:** to amuse and delight; to appeal to the reader’s senses and imagination; to present humour or other enjoyable material. Authors with this purpose entertain in various ways, through fiction and nonfiction.

3.8.4. **To instruct:** to explain how to do something. If you think the purpose is to inform, think about whether there is a more precise way to describe it. (For example, if it informs you about how to *do* something, call it instruct.)

**1.9. Understanding Tone**

Understanding the “author’s purpose, tone, point of view, and intended audience” (sanchezclass.com, 2010) are complementary skills. Understanding one skill helps you understand the others. Tone and purpose go together. “Tone refers to the author’s use of words and writing style to convey his or her attitude towards a topic”. Ask yourself what the “author’s voice would sound like if he or she had spoken the words rather than written them”. Ask yourself, “What is the author’s real meaning?” The author’s tone helps you understand the author’s intended (real) meaning. The author’s *intended meaning* is what the author wants readers to understand, even if the words appear to be saying something different. A sarcastic tone, for example, can change the meaning completely. If you misinterpret the tone (such as sarcasm), you may misinterpret the message. Don’t confuse a description of a topic with a description of the tone. (A sad topic could be presented in a neutral tone). Be specific about who the intended audience is. Do not say the intended audience is “the readers.” Tell who those readers would be. (sanchezclass.com, 2010).
“A writer’s tone reveals the attitude he or she has toward a subject. Tone is expressed through the words and details the writer selects. Just as a speaker’s voice can project a range of feelings, a writer’s voice can project one or more tones, or feelings: anger, sympathy, hopefulness, sadness, respect, dislike, and so on. Understanding tone is then, an important part of understanding what an author has written” (John Langan, p. 293). He gives a list of words that describe tone:

There are many words that can be used to describe an author’s tone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admiring</th>
<th>calming</th>
<th>doubtful</th>
<th>encouraging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forgiving</td>
<td>grateful</td>
<td>humorous</td>
<td>insulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyous</td>
<td>loving</td>
<td>playful</td>
<td>respectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-pitying</td>
<td>threatening</td>
<td>warm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.9.1. More words that describe Tone – with their meanings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ambivalent</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>uncertain about a choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bewildered</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>confused; puzzled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>deeply sympathetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressed</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>very sad or discouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypocritical</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>false</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impassioned</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>filled with strong feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light hearted</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>happy and carefree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matter-of-fact</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>sticking to facts; unemotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nostalgic</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>longing for something or someone in the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>not influenced by feelings or personal prejudices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pessimistic</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>looking on the gloomy; unfavourable side of things</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Remorseful - guilty over a wrong one has done
Sarcastic - sharp or wounding; ironic
Tolerant - respectful of other views and behavior; patient about problems
Uncertain - doubting

1.10. Evaluating Arguments

“In literature, ‘point of view’ means the person through whose eyes the story is being told” (sanchezclass.com (2010). Author’s point of view is also called the author’s argument. John Langan (p. 323) points out that many of us enjoy a good argument. A good argument is not an emotional experience in which people’s feelings get out of control. Instead, it is a rational discussion in which each person advances and supports a point of view about some matter. In a good argument, the other person listens carefully as we state our case, waiting to see if we really have solid evidence to support our point of view. Argumentation is, then, a part of our everyday dealings with other people. It is also an important part of much of what we read. Authors often try to convince us of their opinions and interpretations. Very often the most important things we must do as critical readers are:

a) Recognize the point the author is making
b) Decide if the author’s support is relevant
c) Decide if the author’s support is adequate

csuchico.edu gives general guidelines for identifying and evaluating an author's argument. It says that the goal is to make sure you:

• are clear about the nature of the argument under examination;
• focus your thinking on the most interesting and controversial steps in the argument; and
• make some progress toward finding the truth, or at least identifying exactly why you agree or disagree with the author's argument.

1.10.1. **STEP 1:** Identify the conclusion of the argument. Sometimes that is more difficult than it at first appears. Note that how you phrase the conclusion can be very important in how you develop the premises supporting it. You may find that as you try to identify premises you change your mind about what the conclusion is or how to phrase it. That is fine.

1.10.2. **STEP 2:** Identify the stated premises mentioned by the author in support of the conclusion. These are the reasons the author gives for believing his or her conclusion. Try to rephrase these as necessary to clarify the points, make them more precise, and fit each premise with the other premises and with the conclusion. List the premises before the conclusion and number them sequentially.

1.10.3. **STEP 3:** Identify any unstated premises or assumptions that are necessary in order that the stated premises actually provide support for the conclusion. Try to phrase these assumptions in a sympathetic way, as you might imagine the author would phrase them.

1.10.4. **STEP 4:** Evaluate whether the premises provide reasonable support for the conclusion.

1.10.4.1. **Inductive Arguments:** If the premises are supposed to provide evidence or support but not conclusive proof of the conclusion, evaluate whether the
premises, if true, would actually provide support for the conclusion and how strong you think the support would be (e.g. in light of contrary evidence).

3.10.4.2 Deductive Arguments: If the premises are supposed to provide conclusive proof of the conclusion, evaluate whether the argument is valid or invalid.

- Valid: it is impossible for the conclusion to be false if all the premises were true
- Invalid: this is not impossible
- If you decide a deductive argument is invalid, change it to make it valid, adding premises as necessary. Then go to Step 5.

1.10.5. **STEP 5:** Evaluate whether the premises are true or false. Is there reason to question one of the premises? What could the author say in defense of the premise?

1.10.6. **RECURSION STEP (Optional):** If one premise is especially important to evaluating the argument, go back to Step 1 and take that premise as a conclusion, looking for a further argument in support of it, and then evaluating that further argument. This then could lead to another recursion to evaluate another premise, and so on until all questions are resolved and the truth has become transparent to all!

An argument is a conclusion based upon evidence (i.e. premises).

Arguments are commonly found in newspaper editorials and opinion columns, as well as magazine essays. To evaluate these arguments,
you must judge whether it is good or bad. "Good" and "bad" are not, however, merely subjective opinions (learn-lexiconic.net, 2012).

When you evaluate your essays and columns, you probably won't use everything in this list below. Focusing on one issue or another is usually quite effective, since a long list of criticisms becomes tiresome and difficult to explain thoroughly.

1.10.7. **Fairness:**

Is the argument fair and balanced, or does it contain bias? Bias can be detected by asking the following questions:

1. Is the argument overly emotional and filled with loaded language?
2. Is the argument one-sided? Are there alternative points of view not addressed? What are the implications of this narrowness?

1.10.8. **Evidence and Logic:**

- Are the given premises reliable and relevant? Are they thoroughly explained?
- Does the author make contradictory points?
- Does the author make concessions to alternative views without explaining why they are nevertheless subordinate to his/her main view?
- Do the premises themselves require further justification? (That is, do they beg the question?)
- Is the movement from premise to conclusion logical? Does the argument contain gaps in reasoning or logical fallacies?