**Introduction**

The mass of words that bombards us every day-from newspapers, magazines, textbooks, the Internet, advertising of all stripes, junk mail, political slogans, and speeches-makes it vital for us to develop a keen critical stance. The increasing popularity and influence of the World Wide Web-a truly revolutionary means of disseminating information-has compounded the problem of information overload. And many people now turn to the Web first, rather than to traditional research tools in the library, as a source of information.

Despite this extraordinary convenience, simple lack of editorial scrutiny is the crucial difference between traditional printed material and material published on the Web. The typical magazine article, for example, is pored over by editors and copy editors before it ever gets into your mailbox or onto the magazine stand. But the Web is completely egalitarian in its origins: Anyone can create a Web site; indeed, thousands of new sites are added each week

In essence the Web is an anarchic system, with no rules or strictures as to what can be published-at once its greatest virtue (no censorship) and its greatest handicap (no external objective analysis for fairness, bias, evidence, and the like)

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.

Reading plays a significant role in students’ academic life. Pretorius (2010) found a strong correlation between students’ reading proficiency and their academic success by explaining that more reading leads to higher grades.

**Elements of an argument:**

Some of what is published is very good, some is mediocre, and some is awful. How do you learn to tell the difference? What criteria should you use to determine whether a persuasive or argumentative piece of writing is "good" or "bad, /I whether the argument is sound or unsound? Here are some simple standards for judging what you read.

The main idea or thesis in persuasive or argumentative prose (usually called the argument or sometimes the proposition) should be clearly stated. The writer should **define key words**, especially abstract words open to subjective interpretation or used in a personal way (like honor, responsibility, evil). The language should be clear and unambiguous; words should be used consistently to mean the same thing. The evidence in support of the argument should be logically arranged, and it should be relevant to the main idea. Moreover, the evidence should **appeal to our intelligence** and to our reason, not solely to our emotions. In addition, there should be sufficient evidence to support the point.

you learned that one characteristic of good argumentative prose is that the author takes care to define key words, especially an abstract word open to subjective interpretation or one used in a personal or idiosyncratic way. For example, consider this argument:

Abortion should be prohibited because it means taking the **life** of a human being.

The crucial phrase here is "life of a human being." Before we can decide on the worth of this argument (along with the many other problems and questions associated with abortion), we need to be sure of what we mean by "life." Roman Catholics believe that life begins at the moment of conception, when the egg and sperm unite. At the other extreme, some believe that a fetus is not truly a human being until it is viable, meaning that it is capable of surviving outside the mother's womb. Your acceptance or rejection of the previously stated abortion argument may, to some degree, depend on whether or not you accept the writer's implicit definition of "human life."

Another important element of an argument is the **refutation**, in a short editorial usually just a paragraph or two in which the writer refutes the opposition, meaning that he or she examines opposing arguments and deals with them. With any issue, no single position is either all right or all wrong, and the writer who ignores or disregards the other side or opposing arguments runs the risk of having the reader ask, understandably enough, "Yes,but what about ... ?/1Therefore, in an editorial or opinion piece, **a careful writer should include one or two of the opposition's strongest arguments and offer a rebuttal to them. A refutation can take several forms: The writer might concede that the opposition's argument has merit but that his or her own position is more vital or more significant in the long run; he or she might prove the opposing side in error by offering statistics disproving its claims; he or she can dispel myths associated with the opposing side, and so forth. As you work through the editorials at the end of this and the next chapter, it is a good idea to practice separating out these elements.**

The second element in analyzing arguments is to uncover any unstated assumptions. All arguments rest on these assumptions or premises-the seemingly self-evident beliefs that underlie our thinking. We accept them, usually without even being aware of them.

Here is an example:

 Because my sister is getting married next month in our backyard, we need to hire a caterer to prepare the food and a gardening crew to work on the yard.

Underlying this argument are these assumptions

Hiring a caterer will be less hassle for us than if we prepare the food ourselves.

• We have enough money to pay for a caterer and a gardening crew.

Unlike these two real-life situations where we can safely take the unstated assumptions for granted, the nature of argumentative writing demands that we sort out the external statement and the assumptions that govern the writer's position. This does not mean that unstated assumptions are bad or somehow deliberately manipulative. It does mean that our accepting an argument may depend on our accepting the assumptions propping it up, as you saw in the "human life" example earlier. For example, consider this statement:

School districts should not spend precious funds on expensive computer equipment at the expense of programs like art, music, and physical education programs. Can you accept this argument? Can you identify the underlying assumptions, and if so, accept them? I see the two primary ones as being (a) that money allotted to school districts is limited and (b) that developing an appreciation for art and music and participation in sports are more important than developing computer skills. You should recognize that there is no "right" or "wrong" answer here, but rejecting the purchase of computers can at least be questioned, if not refuted. One solution to this either-or situation (Le., either computers or enrichment programs), obviously, would be to properly fund school districts to permit both kinds of programs to flourish. (In Chapter 9, you will learn another way to analyze this argument, since it represents a fallacy called "false dilemma

The final step in evaluating arguments is looking at the evidence. The term evidence refers to the information or support used to prove or support an argument. Without generalizing, it seems fair to say that most good argumentative prose is supported by one or a combination of these types:

 • Facts and/or statistics, including surveyor poll results.

 • Examples and illustrations, whether from the outside world or from the writer's personal experience.

 • Good reasons.

• Historical analysis. • Analogy.

 Finally, evidence should meet these criteria: it must be fair, accurate, sufficient, and relevant. In this excerpt, Andrew Hacker's purpose is to destroy the myth that American black culture is inhospitable to entrepreneurship. He begins by summarizing the arguments used to explain the supposedly small number of black-owned businesses. His evidence is in the form of facts, statistics, and good reasons, all of which refute the myth that blacks are denied business opportunities. By citing figures for all ethnic groups, Hacker convincingly shows that, even in comparison with white-owned businesses, blacks do fairly well. The argument is strengthened by the fact that over 90 percent of whites are on someone else's payroll.