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Dinod Ddiw Sert  
University of Wales  
Ynny Sallt David

## Reading at Masters Level: So What's the Difference?

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### Aims of the Session

- To help you understand what is 'different' (and the same!) about reading at Masters level as opposed to undergraduate level
- To revise some of the key concepts that are central to good academic reading
- To help you identify where to get support to help you develop your reading skills further.

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So what do you think are the differences between reading at Masters level and reading at degree level?

- Masters level = level 7
- Degree level = level 6

- In Small groups discuss....

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## Masters Level: Academic Views

In your groups---consider what each of the below means in practice

'Using high quality information to show in depth knowledge and understanding'

'Examining issues in depth'

'Always looking at things from different perspectives'

'High level critical discussion'

'Ability to deconstruct problems'

'Problem solving using evidence'



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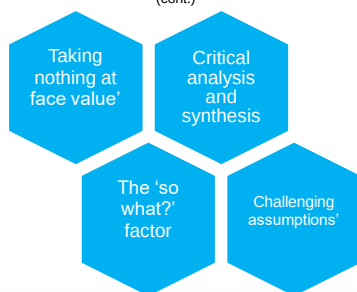
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## Masters Level: Academic Views

(cont.)



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## Academic Levels

| Level   | What does it look like?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Level 4 | <b>Description</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opinion and research findings used to illustrate points but taken 'at face value'</li> <li>Theories and experiences described</li> </ul>                                                                                                              |
| Level 5 | <b>Discussion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compare and contrast different research findings, opinions and experiences</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Level 6 | <b>Critical analysis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>View different research findings, opinions and experiences critically</li> <li>Emphasis on importance of 'good' evidence as a basis for drawing conclusions</li> </ul>                                                                          |
| Level 7 | <b>Critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In depth critical analysis of research findings, opinions and experiences used to construct an argument</li> <li>Justifying a particular viewpoint or conclusion as a result of 'weighing up' the evidence</li> </ul> |

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## Reading at Postgraduate level : Expectations?

- Part of an education at this level is developing the **ability to determine the additional information you need**,
- and the skills to locate and access it.
- It requires particular skills to be selective in what you read.



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## Reading at Postgraduate level : Expectations?

- You will need to read large quantities of text quickly, accurately and critically.
- 'critical' means discerning the strengths and the limitations of the work you are studying, so you can engage with it at an appropriate level.



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## Critical Thinking - Analysis

- 'Detailed examination of elements' (OED)
- Critiquing different viewpoints – other people's positions, arguments and conclusions
- Evaluating the reliability and validity of the literature/evidence
- Viewing everything you read critically – not taking anything at face value
- Weighing up opposing arguments
- Structured reflection on personal experience (Cottrell 2005, Thomson 1995, Fowler 2007)



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Analysis is  
sometimes seen as  
'taking things apart'  
'breaking them down'  
or 'deconstructing'  
them



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## Finding appropriate academic material

- Where will you find the material?
- What should you look for initially?
- Who can help you?
- Work in groups to discuss and outline this...



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## You have found what you are looking for how do you know its worth spending the time reading?

| Evaluation                                                                                                | Question                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Relevance</b><br>Look at the introduction or overview to check what it's about                         | Does the information match my needs?                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Provenance</b><br>Don't be tempted to use information that may not have academic credibility           | Is it clear where the information has come from? Can I identify the authors or organisations responsible? How was it published? Has it been peer reviewed?                                     |
| <b>Objectivity</b><br>Look for an introduction or overview that describes affiliations or funding sources | Is the author's position or interest made clear? Does the author declare any connections that might compromise their independence? Is the language emotive? Are there hidden vested interests? |



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**You have found what you are looking for how do you know its worth spending the time reading? Cont...**

| Evaluation                                                                                                | Question                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Presentation</b><br>Look at language, layout and structure to check whether you can use it confidently | Is the information clearly communicated?                                                                                    |
| <b>Method</b><br>Be aware of the differences in research methods                                          | What research methods were used, and how are results reported? Do I need to check how significant the results actually are? |
| <b>Timeliness</b><br>Don't risk using obsolete evidence or data                                           | Is it clear when the information was produced? Does the date of the information meet my requirements?                       |

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**What is the difference between primary and secondary sources in academic literature?**

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## A Primary Source

- A primary source is the original publication of information, including any 'raw' data, usually with an appropriate statistical analysis.
- Or Empirical data collection...

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## A Secondary Source

- A secondary source is a subsequent publication that draws on the original, quite possibly for different purposes.
- You may have read of instances where a publication applied an inappropriate analysis of someone else's material, thus producing misleading findings.
- A secondary source should acknowledge where its information comes from, so readers may refer to the primary source to see how the material was originally obtained and reported.



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## What source should I use?

- Text book
- Academic Journal
- Professional Journal
- Government Literature
- Organisational literature

- What are the:
  - Strengths
  - Limitations of each of these?
  - Discuss in your groups.



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## Reading efficiently

- This is a fairly ruthless approach, but one which helps you to be selective
- Scanning
- Skimming
- Gutting the literature



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Synthesis  
reconstructs things –  
puts things together  
to reach a conclusion  
and make a clearer  
picture

## Where to get support

- If you require advice please ask module tutors and or personal tutors...
  - Support is available from the library and student services
  - Read/ buy : Cottrell, S. (2005) *Critical Thinking Skills*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan
  - **SUPPORT EACH OTHER : Talk about your work, your theories...this will help develop your critical thinking skills...and reading**

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