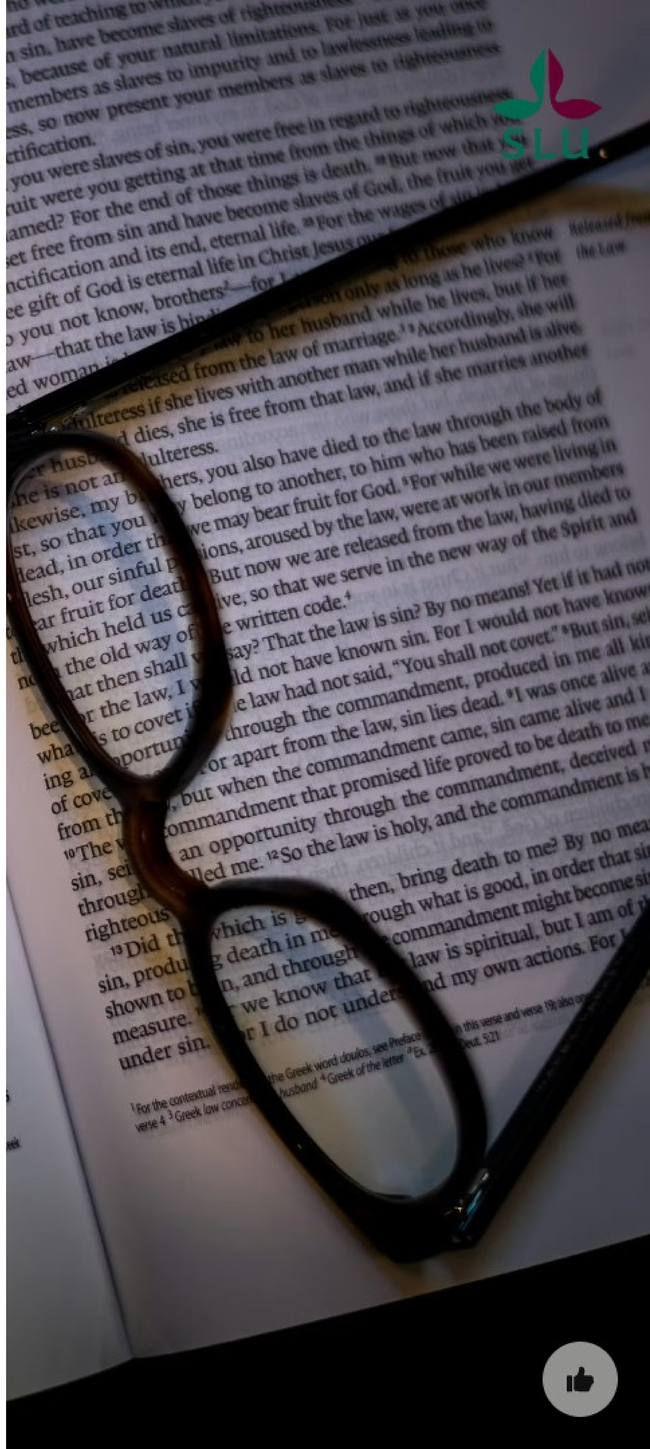
# Source evaluation – How to improve your critical reading

Katarina Böhme Evengård, SLU University Library



# What does critical reading mean t you?

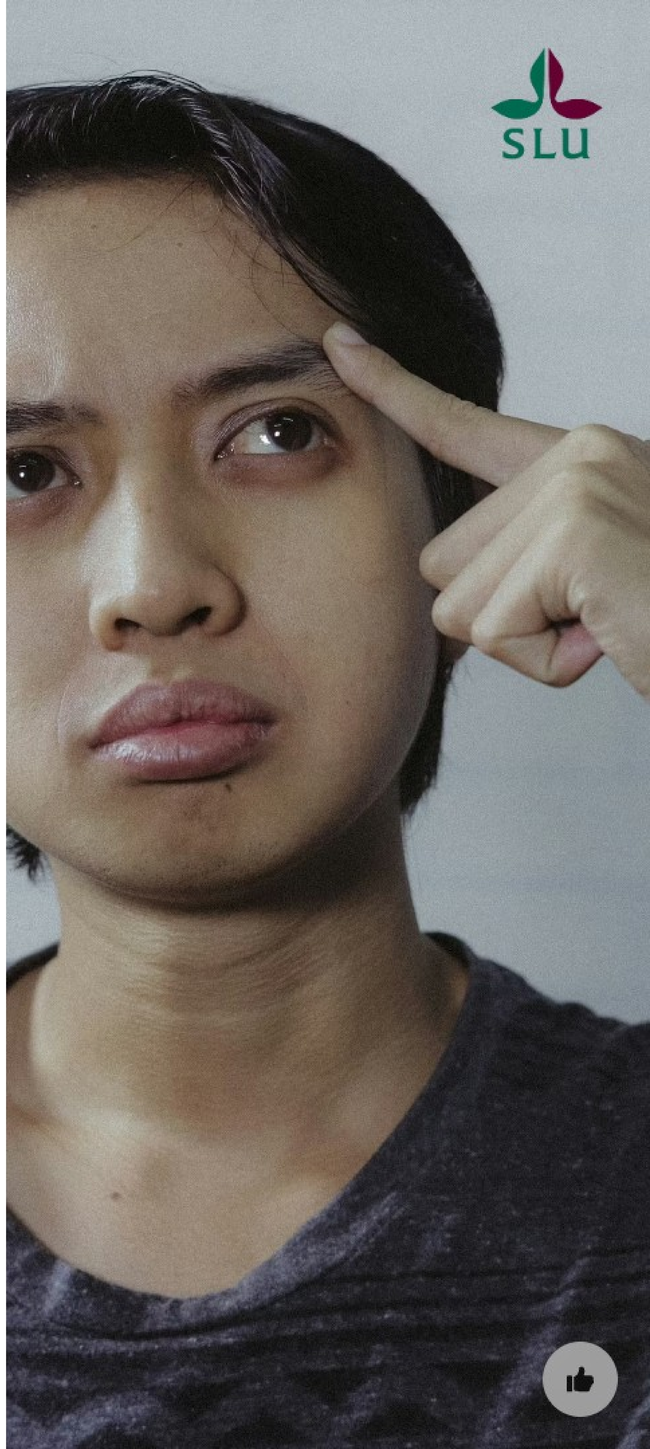
# Critical reading and source evaluation are closely connected

Critical reading is important to be able to evaluate sources.

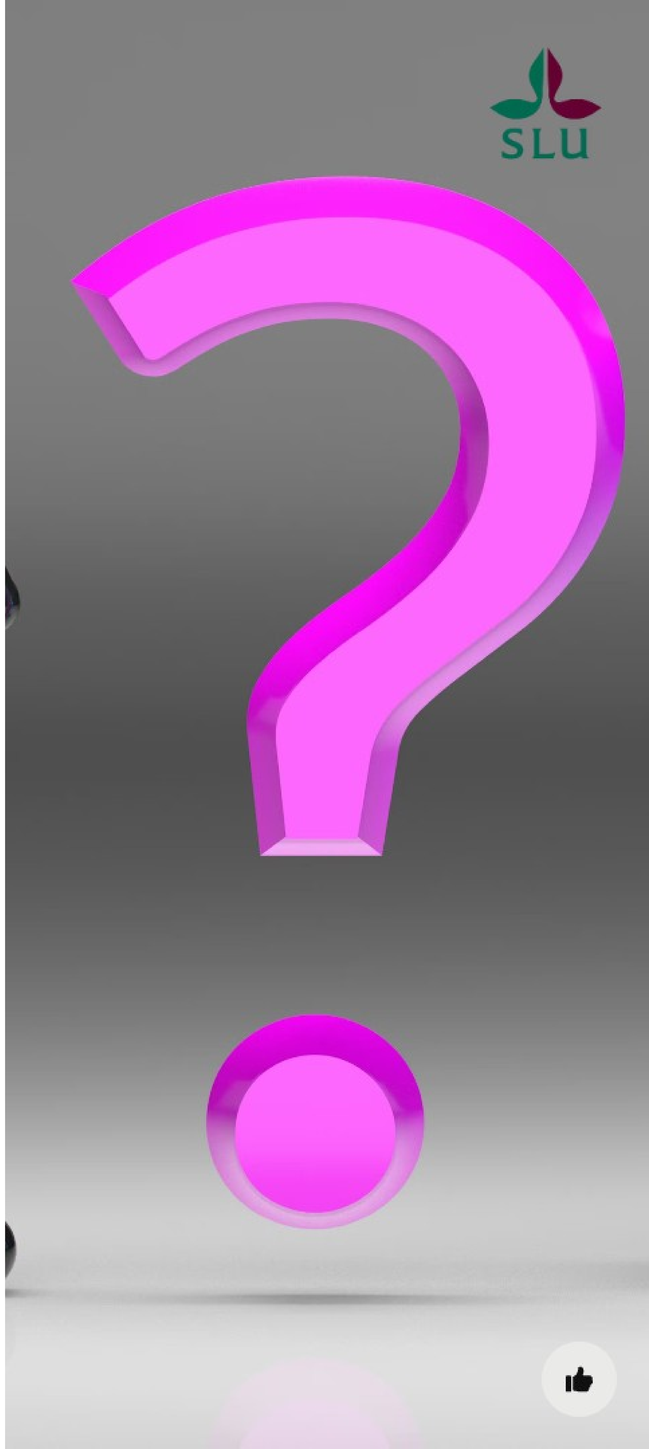
# What is critical reading?

- Identifying the text´s strengths and implications
- Identifying the text´s weaknesses and flaws
- Looking at the 'big picture' and deciding how the text fits into the greater academic context

From Massey University, *Critical thinking and reading*. https://www.massey.ac.nz/study/study-and-assignment-support-and-guides/study-skills/critical-thinking-and-reading/



Critical reading involves asking questions!



# Relevance and Quality

- A **relevant but low-quality** source can weaken your argument
- A **high-quality but irrelevant** source adds little value

# Check the relevance

- **Topic Match** – Does the article's topic fit your purpose and problem statement?
- **Function** – Is the article providing background? Contributing with theory? Does it help answering your research question?
- **Study design/Population** – Is the population similar to the one you want to study?
- **Timeliness** – Is it recent and up-to-date?

# Check the quality

- **Source Credibility** – Published in a trusted scientific journal?

# Source credibility, is it a trusted journal?

- Check the journal's website and read about its peer review process
- See if the journal is published by a well-known publisher
- Check if the journal is indexed in well-known databases
- Check with your teacher or librarian.
- Read more on how to evaluate journals on Think Check Submit https://thinkchecksubmit.org/journals/

# More questions to check the quality

- **Author expertise** – Research background? Expertise in the subject?
- **Use of sources** – What sources are used and how are they used?
- **Clarity of results** – Presented clearly and understandable?
- **Conflict of interest** – Any funding that could affect the results?
- **Method** – Clearly described, rigorous, and appropriate for the study?

# Further questions to evaluate the method

- Is the research qualitative or quantitative?. Is this type of method appropriate for this topic?
- Is the methodology valid? (e.g. size of the sample, method of sampling used)
- Is the approach typical of your field?
- Are the results verifiable?
- Is the research replicable?

Questions from Massey University, *Critical thinking and reading*. https://www.massey.ac.nz/study/study-and-assignment-support-and-guides/study-skills/critical-thinking-and-reading/

# More critical reading questions

- What is the author's central argument or main point?
- What was the outcome of the research?
- What kind of evidence does the author provide?
- What was the context for this research/publication?
- What do you find convincing about the text?
- What do you disagree with? Why?
- What did this research contribute to the field?

From University of Glasgow, *Critical reading handout*

# Common pitfalls when evaluating sources

- Confirmation bias
- Prestige bias
- Algorithmic bias  (filter bubble)

# Filter bubble experiment

1. Search on climate change (without quotation marks) in google
2. Copy the URL of the top result (the first link that appears in the result list) and paste it into the Zoom chat.

# Burst your filter bubble

- Understand your own bias
- Clear search history and delete browser cookies
- Use incognito mode when searching
- Use a search engine that does not track your search history, i.e. DuckDuckGo
- Go past the first page of results
- Talk to peers outside your field

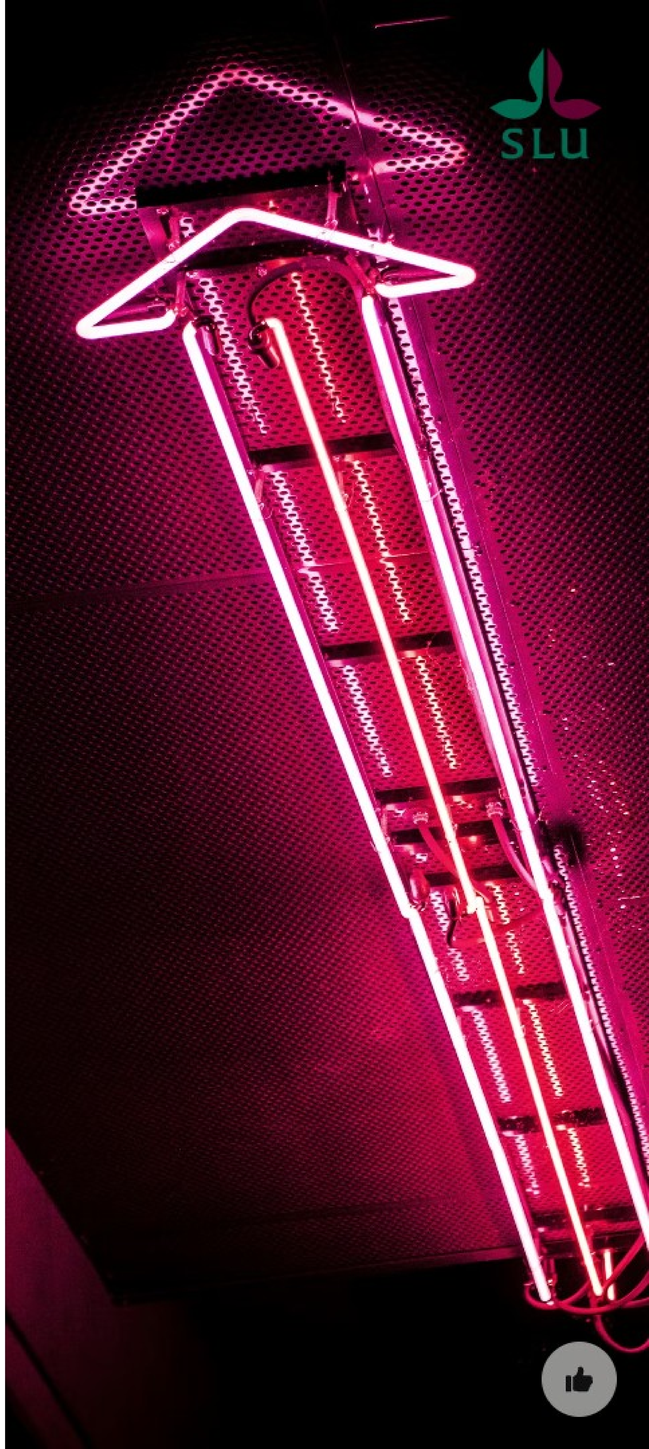
# Building better critical reading habits

- Use checklist with critical questions, i.e *Critical thinking and reading(* Massey University) https://www.massey.ac.nz/study/study-and-assignment-support-and-guides/study-skills/critical-thinking-and-reading/
- and University of Glasgow, *Critical reading handout* https://edshare.gla.ac.uk/1390/1/Critical%20Reading%20Handout.pdf
- Reading logs/templates i.e *Template for Taking Notes on Research Articles*(Rice University) https://www.cmor-faculty.rice.edu/~symes/CAAM600/TakingNotes.pdf
- Discuss with peers

# Critical reading might be perceived as time-consuming. But...

Practice makes it easier and faster.

# And the bonus: Critical reading improves academic writing!



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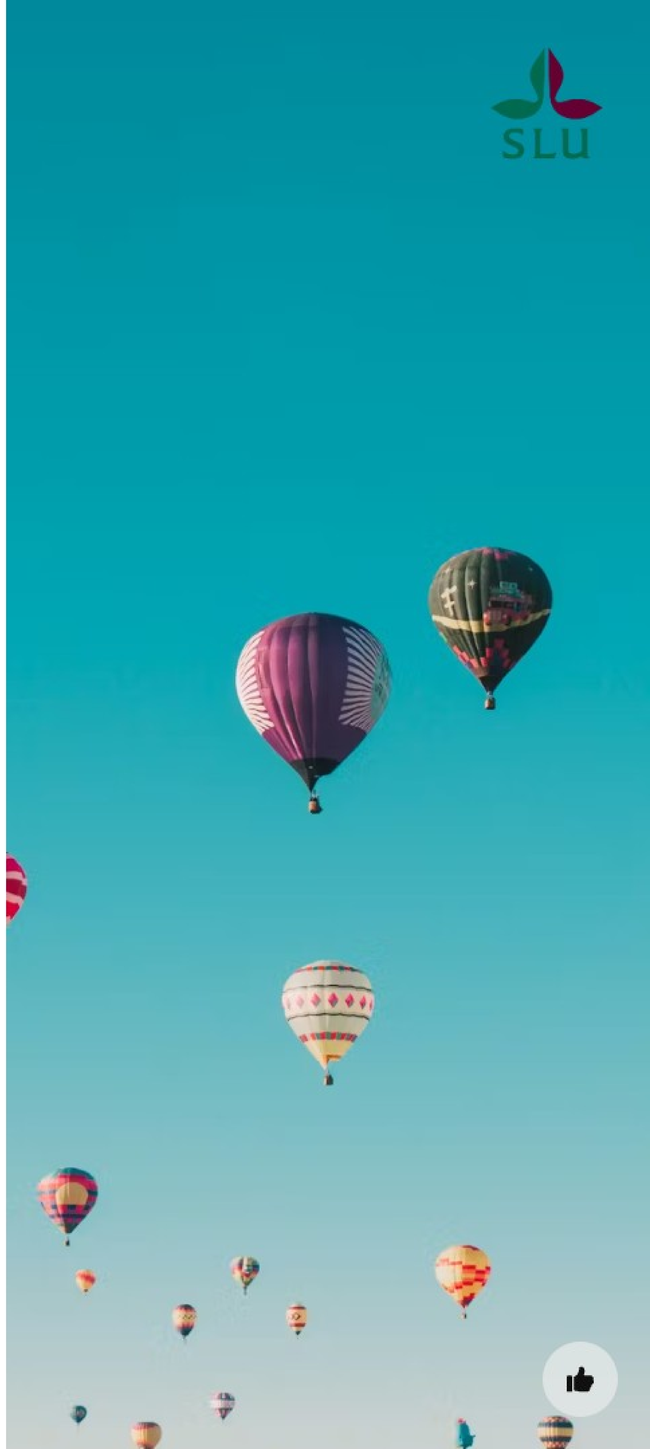
And good luck with your critical reading and to evaluate sources!