

Book Review

Thinking Beyond the Content: Critical Reading for Academic Success

Authors: Nolan J Weil and Raymond Cepko

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For international students whose native language is not English, going to university in the United Kingdom may seem a bit scary and even intimidating. Even though nearly half of the student body in the institution where I am studying is international, we know that the majority of people we are going to be working with during our undergraduate studies are native speakers. Therefore, it is expected of us to assimilate a whole new academic reading culture, which is the basis for university success. *Thinking Beyond the Text: Critical Reading for Academic Success* by Nolan J. Weil and Raymond Cepko, published by Michigan ELT in 2008, is a fundamental tool for both teachers and students on a foundation course when making this transition from one language to another, from one reading system to another, and from one academic culture to another.

Firstly, the book's aim goes far beyond understanding the literal meanings of words on a piece of paper. It teaches students how to make use of their critical and analytical skills in order to answer complex but important questions regarding an immense variety of themes. These range from climate change to artificial intelligence (AI) and global health, of interest to readers from a wide range of academic fields. One example is a text about the growing influence of *chatbots* not only in the field of robotics and AI but also in the very study of language and its complexities. Thus, the book successfully emphasizes the need for active instead of passive reading which is intended developing the skill of interacting with the text.

Another advantage of the book is the fact that it deals closely with a wide range of academic vocabulary which many international, and indeed domestic students lack. Every text is followed by interesting exercises asking the students to link key words and expressions to their meaning as presented in the text. A text about infectious diseases, for instance, presents words such as *quarantine*, *pandemic* and *immunity*. In this way, the reader learns new words and how to use them in various contexts.

The organisation and format of the book is also pedagogically interesting. The book is divided into four units with three readings in each. These texts introduce students to a variety of styles and genres, thus sensitising the reader to different types of text and promoting the evaluation of sources. The readings are preceded by an overview of the general theme along with pre-reading questions which are aimed at sparking the students' curiosity and attention. Following the texts, there is a series of different and engaging tasks that can be done individually or in groups. A good example are the Critical Focus sections, which address topics such as detecting bias in a text or making use of citations and references.

It is worth noting, however, that no book is supposed to be an end in itself. In other words, its full potential cannot be achieved without an active teacher and motivated students. In my own experience, I was only able to maintain my concentration and interest in the tasks

due to my teacher's very active and engaging style, asking us intriguing questions that were not in the book while stimulating discussion and debate. Providing the students with a more humane and interactive side of education, therefore, is a vital complement for the strictly established exercises of the book.

Finally, I would like to strongly recommend *Thinking Beyond the Text: Critical Reading for Academic Success*. As an international student and a non-native speaker, I can attest to the benefits of learning an English critical reading style while developing new perspectives on extremely relevant subjects of today's world.

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