Why do you need to read critically?

To avoid situations like this:


Iran's news agency portrays satirical Onion story as its own - CNN.com

By Michael Martinez, CNN
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(CNN) -- Add Iran's news agency to the long list of those hoodwinked by the satire of The Onion.

Iran's semi-official Fars News Agency published a story Friday claiming that a Gallup poll found that rural white Americans prefer Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad over President Barack Obama.

Such a poll would indeed be big news in Iran (and the United States) -- if it were true.

But the source was The Onion, the publication that presents the outlandish as real news.
Critical Reading is a type of reading where the reader becomes an active participant in the reading of the text.

- This is different than normal reading because in this type of reading the reader does not merely accept everything that is said in a text.
- Instead, critical reading involves engaging with what is said in a text. This engagement begins with making observations about the text, and these observations could take the form of questioning the evidence presented in the text, questioning the conclusions drawn in a text, questioning the bias of a text, etc.
- The result of critical reading is that the reader is able to gain a more full understanding of a text and of the readers’ thoughts in relation to that text.
1. Don’t read the text yet! Before you ever begin reading your text, look at what surrounds the text.
   - If you are looking at a web source, what advertisements are also on the site? What type of audience would find these ads appealing?
   - What else is also on the site and what type of audience does this other content seem to be targeting?
   - Ask what this says about the purpose that your source is likely focused on accomplishing and what audience your source is trying to accomplish this purpose with.

2. Look at the prefatory information of your source.
   - Research the text’s author to see how much authority this author has to write on this topic.
   - Check the date of the source and consider what was happening in the world when this text was published.
3. Scan the text, but still don’t read it.
   - Look over the entire text and ask what first catches your eye.
   - Are there pictures? Why might those pictures have been chosen?
   - Glancing at paragraphs, do numbers or dates jump out at you? In general, how long are the paragraphs?

4. Scan a little closer so that you read only the first and last sentence of each paragraph.
   - As you do this, identify the text’s thesis/main idea.
   - Also, make an outline of how the thesis is supported, identifying the text’s main points.
5. Now that you know the structure of the text, fill in the details of that structure by finally reading the text.
   - Keep your outline in front of you as you read the text so that you can fill in what support is given for each of the main points that you identified on your outline.

6. Think about specific word choices in the text.
   - Here, we are asking why the author chose to use a specific word or phrase instead of other words/phrases.
   - For example, using the word “murder” is a much more emotionally charged word than the word “kill,” though they both have similar meanings. Look for other emotionally charged words/phrases.
   - Look for words that you may not understand and look them up.
   - Look for words that are repeated or synonyms that are often used.
7. Question the source.

- By this point, you should have a very clear understanding of what your text is communicating and what purpose your text is trying to accomplish.
- Only after you understand your text can you think critically about the text and one way to do this is to begin asking questions. Here are some example questions that you could ask:
  - Is this text’s thesis fully supported? Where is it not?
  - What type of support is included in this text?
  - Is there any recognizable bias in this text? If so, what is that bias?
  - What type of person is this text targeting?
  - How convincing is this text’s thesis?
  - Is this a reliable source?
Choose a text that you are using for a class and do a close reading of it, following the steps suggested in this lesson.