

Title of Module: *Reading for Writing*

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Video 1: *Critical Reading for Academic Writing*

Reading Habits

Reading is at the center of your work for every college course. Academic reading is intense and can be challenging. If you read carefully and interact with the text, you will retain more – and more lasting – information. Since the volume of assigned reading is daunting, and you don't have the luxury to re-read all the materials, you will have to learn strategies that make the task more efficient. These strategies will gradually become habits of mind, allow you to grow intellectually, and bring you academic and, later, professional success.

Reading, writing, and inquiry are inseparably linked in college. Academic work expects you to take an active role as a rhetorical reader who analyzes both *what* the text says and *how* it says it, thus co-constructing meaning. Only if you train yourself to read rhetorically will you be able to write papers that contribute to the larger intellectual conversation.

In reading across the disciplines, you will be expected to switch from textbooks to primary sources, and figure out the scholarly conversation about the topic, with attention divided between the content and the authors' rhetorical strategies. Good comprehension is a process: it is achieved step by step, as you gradually develop deeper understanding. Here are the basic steps of the reading process that will also lay the basis for writing strong academic papers:

- Previewing
- Annotating
- Outlining, summarizing, analyzing
- Discovering patterns
- Contextualizing

We'll walk you through each of these steps and recommend that you consistently practice them on your current course materials.

Video 2: *The Process of Reading Rhetorically*

Step One: Previewing

You will have certain expectations about the text you are assigned to read (based on its place in the syllabus, the instructor's introduction of its purpose, previous experience with similar texts, etc.). Experienced readers vary their strategies according to their purpose: they skim, scan, re-read the text. Look for clues to help you reconstruct the context – title, background notes, date and place of publication, table of contents, graphics or cover design, headings, introduction, and conclusion. Approach the text with curiosity and ask yourself:

- What does the title suggest?
- Is the author known to you? When was the text written?
- Is there an introduction with background information about the author?
- How is the text organized? What does this tell you about the message the author is trying to convey?
- Can the organization help you identify the genre of the text -- for example, scholarly essay/newspaper article/textbook chapter. These types of texts (genres) have different ways of organizing the information they present and expect different things from the reader.

Step Two: Annotating

Critical reading demands that you enter in active conversation with the text. When you annotate, you maintain a dialogue with the ideas you encounter there, keep track of them, and record your impressions and reactions. Set priorities: first, read globally -- to grasp the gist of the content; then focus on decoding meaning through the vocabulary, with particular attention to the key concepts.

Note: If you use your computer to take notes instead of writing annotations on the page, be sure to label each note so that you remember where it came from (you will need this information for the in-text references and work-cited page)

The following are effective ways to converse with the text:

- Use pen or pencil rather than a highlighter, which makes too many things seem important. Circle, underline selectively, mark unfamiliar terms and references, bracket puzzling passages. Those offer contextual clues and help you monitor your developing comprehension.
- Write in the margins: comment with words or phrases to express your ongoing ideas, connections to other things you've read (for a particular course or in general). These notes will trigger your memory later, when you review the class materials for a test or project. You can invent your own symbols to mark up the text -- as handy signals when you make decisions about suitable quotes for a paper.
- Get used to asking questions: what/why/how?...Interrogate the meaning of the points made; the intentions of the author/ of the instructor who assigned it. Record these questions in the margins, or after the text, as helpful reminders when you continue to process the text.
- To foster the reading-writing connection, experts recommend that you keep a *reading log* (a notebook or journal) in which you practice the strategies described here. The reading log will also help generate ideas for your papers.

Video 3: Digesting the Text

Step Three: Outlining, Summarizing, Analyzing

Outlining is an extended form of annotating, typically using phrases and incomplete sentences. It allows you to dissect the argument the text makes – its claims, evidence, outcomes – by making the hierarchy of ideas transparent.

Summarizing has the same goal, but it presents the gist of the text in logically connected form, with complete sentences and paragraphs.

Analyzing goes a step beyond summarizing, adding reflection on the “what” and “how” of the text, and evaluating the effectiveness of its argument. This step asks you to read between the lines, mining for ideas that are implied and allow you to make reasonable inferences.

Step Four: Discovering Patterns

Depending on their purpose, authors apply various techniques (repetition of key concepts, types of reasoning or examples, signal words, imagery, visuals, etc.) to give salience to their points or convey a mood. Watch for such identifiable patterns of writing and track them throughout the text so you can discover a position or agenda that might be hard to detect.

Step Five: Contextualizing

This final stage of the reading process asks you to take a step back and place the text among the others you have read for this class or in other classes. Think of all the factors that may have

influenced this text – historical, cultural, etc. Your own experience will always give special meaning to your interpretation and shape the inferences you will make. Ask yourself: can you identify themes or ideas that also appear in other works you've read; can you discover parallels with your own experience?

Keep in mind that the text is shaped by the combined factors of audience, genre, and purpose. This awareness will help you understand the authors' strategies and choices and decide on a purpose for your own paper.

Video 4: *Asking Effective Questions for Critical Reading and Writing*

Active engagement with academic texts involves interrogating their various aspects and contexts. You will naturally begin by obtaining information from the text but then move to more probing questions that explore the writer's values and assumptions. Asking discerning questions will allow you to analyze the text in depth, to engage fellow students in productive discussion, and to eventually write effective papers.

An effective question invites critical thinking: it requires analysis, synthesis, and interpretation to answer it. We'll discuss some common types that will help you understand and formulate good questions.

1. Comprehension Questions:

Also known as *Wh* questions (*who, what, when, where, why, how*), they check your basic understanding. If you ask such questions while you are doing your reading, you will be able to reconstruct the facts of the text and will have points to anchor your analysis later. You can also ask some of those questions of your classmates to make sure that you are all on the same page before launching a discussion.

2. Discussion Questions

The following types of open-ended questions are often used in class discussions (and frequently appear on exams). Usually, there is not one "correct" answer to be found. Answers are opinions or interpretations, supported with examples from the text. These types of questions are also useful for thinking of topic sentences for paragraphs and thesis statements for essays: a topic sentence or a thesis in a paper is usually an answer to such questions.

You can use the patterns with key words below as templates for writing your own questions:

- Analysis: These tend to begin with "*What is the meaning of...?/ How would you explain...?/ What is the importance of...?*"
- Compare/Contrast: Key phrases for these are "*Compare.../ Contrast.../ What is the difference or similarity between...?*"
- Cause/Effect: These often begin with "*What are the causes/results of...? /What connection is there between...?*"
- Clarification: These are signaled by "*What is meant by...?/Explain how...?*"

Question Type	Key Words	Examples
Analysis	What is the meaning of ...? How would you explain ...? What is the importance of ...?	-Why is the novel entitled "Montana 1948"? -What is the importance of the main character's age in "Montana 1948"? -What is the meaning of the word "monoculture" in Leonard's essay on globalization?
Comparison/ Contrast	Compare and contrast X and Y. What is the difference/similarity between?	-What is the difference in the Grandfather's attitude towards each of his sons in "Montana 1948"? -Compare and contrast Gleiser and Wasserstrom's views about the effects of globalization on regional cultures.
Cause/Effect	What are the causes/results of...? What connection is there between...?	-What connection is there between the role of power and the crimes committed in "Montana 1948"? -What are the causes for many children in India to speak English as a main language instead of their parents' native tongue, according to Sharma?
Clarification	What is meant by...? Explain how...	-What is meant by the following expression ...? -Explain how Frank commits suicide in "Montana 1948".

Table 1: Formulating Good Questions

3. Strategies for Writing Discussion Questions

Here are some useful guidelines for formulating questions that will make you effective both in class discussions and in composing your academic papers.

- Be careful to separate facts from opinions: opinions usually lead to discussion questions. While reading, highlight anything that looks like an opinion, a value, or an assumption. These points usually lend themselves to agreement or disagreement.

- Look for problematic parts of an argument – statements that seem too broad or too general; statements that may not apply to everyone. Look for exclusions – are there gaps in the evidence; did the author leave out any reasons or examples?
- Think about the author’s organization and style. Analyze the order of presentation of the points; the effect of the style on you as a reader.
- Think about connections to other readings. What else has been said about this topic? From what perspectives?
- Reflect on larger issues that the text may connect to. What audience is the discussion/paper meant for?
- Finally, avoid the following types of questions -- they lead to dead ends:
 - simple Yes/No question: encourages guessing the answer
 - vague question: too broad, not clear what is being asked
 - leading question: states or implies an answer
 - slanted question: expresses a bias

Once you’ve digested the original sources, you will start planning your own writing. Identify your rhetorical situation: think about the genre, audience, purpose, stance, and the larger context you’d like to engage; then follow the steps of the writing process that engage the effective questions you have generated.

Question Type	Key Words/ Examples	Why it’s Ineffective
Simple Yes/No Question	Is/was...? Was Do/does/did?	encourages guessing; doesn’t generate productive discussion
Vague Question	What do you think about...? What about the author’s claim in para. 4?	too broad; not clear what is asked; not conducive to discussion -> follow up with a more specific question!
Leading Question	Don’t you think...? Isn’t the solution to human tribalism Gleiser presents simplistic?	states or implies an answer; restricts choice in response; may be met with reticence to speak up
Slanted Question	Why is the research on language and thought Boroditsky presents unreliable? Why is the grandfather in “Montana 1948” such a horrible character?	reveals a bias; the questioner’s opinion is implicit (note the strong adjectives)

Table 2: Ineffective Discussion Questions

References

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