



Center for Writing and Speaking

E NO. 12 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

How to Read Critically

Reading effectively is one of the most important things you can do to succeed in your courses and your written work. Critical reading requires actively thinking about and engaging with the text. Following these strategies will ensure that you not only read but also understand your sources. For clarity, the text of this handout refers to reading an article, but the strategies apply to any written source.

Before you read...

- **Get ready to mark!** Make sure you have a pen handy and any other tools that can help you mark up the page as you read: different colored markers or highlighters, post-it notes, etc. Always have a pen on hand so that you can write down your comments and questions as you go—you won't remember them later, and you'll be especially glad you did it if you have an assignment based on the text.
- **Consider any questions or topics** your instructor identified either on the assignment sheet or course syllabus. What kinds of information should you look out for as you read?

As you read...

- **Identify and define** any key terms that come up repeatedly in the article. Keep in mind that the author may have adopted specific definitions for these terms in the context of their argument!
- **Identify the article's main argument (or thesis)** and all major points presented to support that argument. (Hint: subheadings and topic sentences of paragraphs are good places to look!)
- **Write down** any questions or comments you have as you read.
- **Don't get stuck** on any one paragraph or point. If something confuses you, mark it and keep reading. Often the author will provide more detailed explanations in subsequent paragraphs.
- **Look out for any sentences** that say, "In other words..." "I have just stated..." or "I will argue" These are great checkpoints to make sure you are following the author's argument.
- **Try to find a repeated version** of the author's thesis statement in the article's conclusion. Are there more detailed or better explanations here?

After you read...

- **Go back and review** the thesis and main points you identified in the article. This will help you quickly review what the author argued and how they set up her argument.
- **Revisit the questions and problem areas you identified** as you read. What makes sense now? What questions do you still have?
- **Answer the questions** and reconsider the topics your instructor outlined for the assignment.

Write down in a sentence or two the author's main argument and any questions that you still have and bring them to class. Remember that questions make great discussion topics during class time!

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