

How to Read a Book/Text

Levels of Reading:

- A. Elementary Reading: 1) reading readiness; 2) basic vocabulary; 3) vocabulary building and reading for different purposes and in different areas of content, such as science, social studies, language arts, and others; 4) refinement and enhancement of skills: carry over concepts from one piece of writing to another and comparative skills.
- B. Inspectional Reading: 1) systematic skimming or pre-reading; 2) speed reading from beginning to end.
- C. Analytical Reading: 1) What is the book about as a whole? 2) What is being said in detail? 3) Is the book true, in whole or in part? 4) What is the book's significance, that is, why does the author think it is important to know these things and is it important to you to know them. Does the book not only inform but also enlighten?

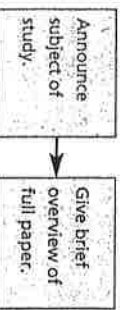
Annotation of Texts:

- A. Underlining – of major points; of important or forceful statements.
- B. Vertical Lines at the Margin – to emphasize a statement already underlined or to point to a passage too long to be underlined.
- C. Star/Asterisk – to be used sparingly, to emphasize the ten or dozen most important statements in the book.
- D. Numbers in the Margin – to indicate a sequence of points made by the author in developing an argument.
- E. Numbers of other pages in the Margin – to indicate where else in the book the author makes the same points, or contradictory ones.
- F. Circling of Key Words or Phrases – more important than underlining.
- G. Writing in the Margin – to record questions, to reduce complicated passages, etc.

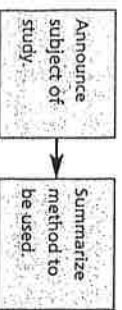
Types of Note-making:

- A. Structural = the organization of the text, the shape of the discussion.
- B. Conceptual = the ideas the author organizes, the substance of the book.
- C. Dialectical = the author's argument, the position the author would like the reader to adopt.

[A descriptive abstract]



[A proposal abstract]



» SEE **W-13** for help analyzing your writing context. See **W-14** for guidelines on drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading your abstract. To read an example abstract, go to www.norton.com/write/little-seagull-handbook.

W-14

Reading Strategies

We read newspapers and websites to learn about the events of the day. We read cookbooks to find out how to make brownies; we read textbooks to learn about history, biology, and other academic topics. We read short stories for pleasure—and, in literature classes, to analyze plot, theme, and the like. And as writers, we read our own drafts to make sure they say what we mean. In other words, we read for many different purposes. This chapter offers strategies for reading texts—and the arguments they make—with a critical eye.

W-14a Reading with a Critical Eye

Different texts require different strategies. Some can be read quickly, if you're reading to get a general overview. But most of the time you'll need to read carefully, skimming to get the basic ideas, then reading again to absorb the details. Following are some strategies for reading with a critical eye.

What do you know about the topic—and what do you want to learn? It always helps to approach new information in the context of what we already know. Before you begin reading, brainstorm what you already know about the topic. List any terms or phrases that come to mind, and group them into categories. Then, or after reading a few paragraphs, list any questions that you expect, want, or hope to be answered as you read, and number them according to their importance to you. Finally, after you read the whole text, list what you learned from it. Compare your second and third lists to see what you still want or need to know—and what you learned that you didn't expect.

Preview the text. Start by skimming to get the basic ideas; read the title and subtitle, any headings, the first and last paragraphs, the first sentences of all the other paragraphs. Study any visuals.

Consider the writing context. What is the **PURPOSE** of the text—to inform? persuade? entertain? Who is the intended **AUDIENCE**? If you're not a member of that group, are there terms or concepts you'll need to look up? What is the **GENRE**—a report? an analysis? something else? What do you know about the writer, and what is his or her **STANCE**—critical? objective? Something else? Is the text print or electronic—and how does the **MEDIUM** affect what it says?

Think about your initial response. Read the text to get a sense of it; then jot down brief notes about your initial reaction, and think about why you reacted as you did. What aspects of the text account for this reaction?

Annotate. Highlight key words and phrases, connect ideas with lines or symbols, and write comments or questions in the margins. What you annotate depends on your purpose. If you're analyzing an argument, you might underline any thesis statement and the reasons and evidence that support it. If you're looking for patterns, try highlighting each one in a different color.

One simple way of annotating is to use a coding system, such as a check mark to indicate passages that confirm what you already thought, an X for ones that contradict your previous thinking, a question mark for ones that are puzzling or confusing, an exclamation point or asterisk for ones that strike you as important, and so on. You might also circle new words that you need to look up.

Play the believing and doubting game. Regardless of how you actually feel about what the writer says, **list** or **review** as many reasons as you can think of for believing it, given the writer's perspective, and then as many as you can for doubting it. This exercise helps you consider new ideas and question your current ideas—as well as clarify where you stand in relation to the ideas in the text.

Analyze how the text works. Outline the text paragraph by paragraph. If you're interested in analyzing its ideas, identify what

each paragraph says. Are there any patterns in the topics the writer addresses? How has the writer arranged ideas, and how does that arrangement develop the topic? If, however, you're concerned with the way the ideas are presented, pay attention to what each paragraph does: Does it introduce a topic? provide background? describe something? entice you to read further?

Summarize. Restate a text's main ideas in your own words, leaving out most examples and other details. This approach can help you both to see the relationships among the text's ideas and to understand what it's saying.

Identify patterns. Look for notable patterns in the text: recurring words and their synonyms, repeated phrases and metaphors, and types of sentences. Does the author rely on any particular writing strategies? Is the evidence offered more opinion than fact? nothing but statistics? Is there a predominant pattern to how sources are presented? As quotations? paraphrases? summaries? In visual texts, are there any patterns of color, shape, and line? What isn't there that you would expect to find? Is there anything that doesn't really fit in?

Consider the larger context. All texts are part of a conversation with other texts, and that larger context can help you better understand what you're reading. What's motivating the writer? What other arguments is he or she responding to? Who is cited?

Be persistent with difficult texts. For texts that are especially challenging or uninteresting, first try skimming the headings, the **ABSTRACT** or introduction, and the conclusion to look for something that relates to knowledge you already have. Then read through the text once just to understand what it's saying and again to look for parts that relate to other parts, to other texts or course information, or to other knowledge you have. Treat such a text as a challenge: "I'm going to keep working on this until I make sense of it."