

Strategies for Reading in College

Reading well is foundational to success in college. When you read well, you are able to respond to your reading in writing, and thus your presentations, writing projects, and exams will depend on how well you have read your textbooks, primary texts, and research sources. As Young and Potter argue, “**reading is essential to participation in any academic discourse community**, wherein reading and writing are done in order to engage in scholarly conversations” (128). In other words, to begin to contribute your own voice, ideas, arguments, and research to the debates in your field, you have to be able to read and respond to the conversation that is already ongoing.

But what does reading well look like? Effective readers do more than simply **understand** the content that they read. They can also “**contextualize**, critically **engage**, and authentically **apply**” what they read (Young and Potter, 120). This guide aims to describe some simple strategies that you can use before, during, and after you read to improve your ability to understand, contextualize, engage, and apply your reading.

STRATEGY #1: PREVIEW

- **Know your purpose:** Why are you reading what you are reading and what do you hope to learn? Why do you think your instructor assigned it?
 - Is this reading supposed to be a **model** for what your own writing in the class looks like?
 - Is this reading supposed to be a **source of information** that you will use in your own argument or essay?
 - Is this reading supposed to help you think about course concepts and **prepare you for class discussion**?
- **Connect to prior knowledge:** What do you already know about this topic, from personal experience, previous coursework, or learning in the current course?
- **Understand the reading’s rhetorical situation:** What do I know about the source of this reading and its audience? How does that help me contextualize the purpose of the reading?
- **Scan the text’s organization:** What are its parts? How is it divided up, if at all? How do those parts help you predict the content?

STRATEGY #2: ANNOTATE

To annotate is to mark up a text with your reactions to it and questions about it. Annotations record your “**inner conversation**” with a text (Harvey and Goudvis 21), and mark the beginning of your **active response** (Carillo 6).

Experiment with marking up a text in a way that makes sense to you. Circle keywords, underline important sentences, write questions or comments in the margin, define words that you don’t know, use checkmarks to signal where you really agree with the text or like what you are reading, or jot down connections you can make between your current reading and prior knowledge or other readings. In other words, write down anything that helps you to begin to respond to the reading.

STRATEGY #3: SUMMARIZE

Writing a summary of an article is a great way to monitor your own understanding. “A summary condenses a paragraph or passage to only its primary points by restating the main idea, major supporting details, and important examples” (Henry 204).

Practice summarizing your reading by closing the book, or turning over the article so you can’t see it. Write 3-5 sentences that capture the main ideas. One way to structure a summary would be to write one sentence for each main section of the reading (e.g. purpose, methods, results, discussion – if the article uses that structure).

STRATEGY #4: REFLECT

After you are done reading, think carefully about how you can engage with and apply the reading. What is your stance in relation to the reading?

Consider writing down a paragraph that responds to some or all of the following questions:

- How has your thinking changed as a result of this reading?
- What ideas or concepts stood out as most important?
- What did you find most interesting, surprising, or perhaps troublesome? Why?
- What do you think the piece does particularly well, and what might some possible limitations be?
- What connections can you make between this and other readings or discussions you have had in college?
- What could you do with this reading? Would you use it to support your own ideas, position it as part of a counter-argument, or use it to complicate or create nuance for your own argument? Or something else?

Works Cited

Carillo, Ellen C. *A Writer's Guide to Mindful Reading*. The WAC Clearinghouse and University Press of Colorado, 2017. Practice & Pedagogy.

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Henry, D. J. *The Effective Reader*. 3rd Ed. Longman/Pearson, 2011.

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