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SSC - 245

Active Reading

Overview: You will probably find that many of your academic writing assignments will be responses to readings or opportunities to demonstrate your understanding and analysis of the readings from assigned texts. Often, you will need to closely read and evaluate research materials so you can incorporate them into research papers. In other words, reading is very important to the production of writing. Specifically, **reading actively** is necessary for thinking critically about a text and fully comprehending and recalling the material. Active reading usually includes pre-reading, annotating or underlining while reading, and reviewing the material after reading. You should develop your own personal active reading process, one that works best for you. Here you will find some suggestions for techniques for active reading of academic texts.

Academic reading is not a passive activity. It requires purposeful and active engagement with the text. In order to fully absorb and understand densely written material, you must **read actively** by taking steps to understand a text before, during, and after your full reading of it. There are many ways to approach this task. Here, you will find some tips to help you begin developing your own active reading process. You may do all of these things or choose the ones that work best for you and for the particular piece.

Pre-reading: Preview or scan the text before reading it entirely.

1. Consider how or by whom it was published. Is it a personal blog, or a blog hosted by a respected news outlet like the BBC? An article in an academic journal? A pamphlet published by a political group? A print book published by a university press? A free, self-published e-book? Publication information may suggest how credible the work is as well as potential biases of the author(s).
2. Look at the title, author, and section headings; then look for words and phrases in bold or italics. Glance briefly at charts, graphs, or other visuals. **EXPLAIN WHY**
3. Try to predict what the material will be about and what the main point might be, as well as the author's purpose and biases. **EXPLAIN WHY**
4. Form questions about the topic based on headings. You can then try to answer these questions during your reading. **EXPLAIN WHY**

Reading: Actively interact with the text while reading.

1. Read slowly enough to think about what you are reading. Active reading is not about moving your eyes over words, but taking the time to interact with the text.

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2. Annotate. Write down any thoughts or questions that come to you as you read. Try to answer the questions as you continue reading.
3. Highlight or underline the main idea of the reading and the major points that support it.
4. Highlight, underline, or circle key terms and other things that seem important.
5. Highlight, underline, or circle words and ideas that seem difficult or are new to you. Don't be afraid to look things up!
6. Write down a short summary of each paragraph or section. Even three- or four-word summaries will help you remember what you read and make it easy for you to find a particular section again later on.
7. Try to answer the questions you asked when you were previewing the text. Do they still seem relevant? Do you have new questions that require further reading or thought?

Review: Think about the material after reading the text fully.

1. Write an objective summary, where you summarize the main idea and important points of the reading but do not give your opinion.
2. Write an evaluative summary, one where you not only summarize the main idea and important points, but also evaluate the author's argument, effectiveness, or bias.
3. Review your annotations and other marks and try to put everything together and draw conclusions about the text.
4. Try to connect the reading to something else. Think about how it fits in with what you're learning in the class overall.

Practice: Notice that the active reading process begins before your actual reading of the text and ends after. This helps ensure that you thoughtfully consider the reading and try to connect it with things outside the text, rather than simply reading the words on the page. It may seem that this active reading process takes longer than passively reading, and, indeed, it does. However, reading actively helps you get more out of the text and, in turn, more out of your time. For example, if you spend fifteen minutes passively reading a chapter, you probably won't comprehend and remember many of the important points. If you read it actively in, say, half an hour, however, you will be more likely to fully understand and be able to recall what you have read. Active reading helps you make better use of your reading time while improving your comprehension of the material.