



Overview: Reading in Different Voices: The lessons here are to be a step-by-step building to a larger assignment that will span a few weeks with reading, writing, editing, revising, and final drafting to be done outside of class. The lesson focuses on the skills needed to read course texts critically and analyze scholarly materials for essay research. It also includes teaching students active reading and essay writing.

Standards Covered:

- **RI 11-12.5.** Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

Objectives:

- Employ close reading skills in a nonfiction reading activity
- Consider a nonfiction reading experience from varying points of view and for varying purposes
- Identify Main Argument/Claim
- Identify elements of support
- Identify use of fallacies
- Identify the thesis statement
- Identify the method of organization
- Identify diction and how it creates a tone
- Write a summary of article from author's point of view
- Write an analysis of author's argument
- Write a personal reflective piece

Materials:

- Any non-fiction article that develops an argument. Use text exemplars in Appendix B for appropriate selection suggestions. For example, George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language" works well.
- Active Reading handout in this folder (optional)

Procedure:

Overview: This unit consists of three separate lessons that each build on the other. Students will be asked to read and assess one article using three different voices: the voice of the author, an evaluative voice, and a personal voice.

Activities should be completed in the order presented. Students will need to complete one lesson before they will have the understanding to move to the next assignment.

Critical skills are the strategies and tools that we use to creatively analyze, compare, synthesize, and communicate information in order to resolve confusions and solve problems. These skills



are prized in every society, but they are essential in modern life where we prize independent, intelligent, and imaginative thinking as the key to future progress.

Before beginning this unit, you students should have ACTIVE READING strategies mastered. If you have not covered this topic, use the ACTIVE READING STRATEGIES handout in this folder.

PART I: The Author's Voice: (NOTE: the following was written for the student, so you can use this part as a student handout)

Critical Skill: Reading and Understanding Instructions:

A key critical skill is reading, understanding, and following directions. Students should read the article assigned and for that article, write the answers to the following questions:

1. What is the purpose and goal of this assignment?
2. What does this assignment ask me to do?
3. What skills does this assignment ask me to use?
4. Do I need any clarifications -- of terms or expectations?

1) Re-read text and write an annotation.

An annotation summarizes the author's arguments and conclusions. In an annotation, you are 'speaking' in the voice of the author, using your own words, but attempting to be true to the meaning and intention of the author. Your goal is not to evaluate but to represent fairly what the author has said and meant. Since **you want to emphasize your own understanding** and ability to explain the text, **do not quote directly from the author**. Do not use excerpts from the text as a substitute for explaining the concepts, argument, or conclusions in your own words. **Your goal is to demonstrate your understanding of the material**. Speaking in the author's voice does not mean pretending to be the author but rather attempting to represent his/her views and arguments without your own interpretations.

You might find this use of the word 'argument' confusing. The everyday use of the word refers to a disagreement or altercation. However in the context of analyzing texts, the argument refers to the set of claims made by an author.

To develop your annotation, answer the following questions:

- What is the article about, that is, the subject of the article?
- What is the author's stated or implied purpose, that is, what controversies or questions is the author addressing?
- What is the method of data collection and analysis?

'Method' refers to **how** an author constructs his/her argument. For example, a writer may use comparison and contrast, an historical approach, qualitative data such as interviews,



quantitative data such as statistics, personal experience, cross-cultural data, theoretical frameworks, the research of others, etc.

What are the findings or conclusions, that is, what is the author's point of view on the controversies/questions being addressed? To a degree, the author is trying to persuade the reader to agree with them.

The final annotation should **not** include all the content or details in the article. Your goal is to highlight the central arguments and the conclusions. Pay attention to the relative weight attached to points by the author and focus only on central points.

Do not write more than one page for your annotation. If your annotation is longer, it is an indication that it is too descriptive. It is easier to write more, but the key is to select the appropriate material to answer the four questions succinctly in your own words. So an excellent annotation depends upon selecting the key points, and choosing what to leave out.

2) Identify and explain 1-2 key concepts which the author uses to develop and support their argument.

A concept helps to explain or make sense of data, detail, information, and experience. It is a general idea or notion that goes beyond the empirical and experiential, beyond what we can observe or directly experience. 'Stereotyping' is an example of a concept.

Concepts are central to the construction of arguments and are the building blocks of theories. So, combining the concept of stereotyping with data on various forms of stereotyping (in advertising, for example) and institutional sites where it occurs (in schools or families) provides the foundation for a theory to explain the devaluation of women's experiences.

Concepts are also 'portable', that is, we can 'internalize' them as part of our knowledge base to help us make sense of other situations. So 'stereotyping' is a concept which can be used to interpret a range of specific experiences. So you might be studying another phenomenon and realize that the concept of 'stereotyping' helps to make sense of it.

Concepts should also be distinguished from 'method' which refers to **how** an author constructs their argument.

Although you may consult a dictionary to deepen your understanding of certain concepts used by the author, be sure to explain the concept **as it is used in the article** and in your own words. **Your goal is to demonstrate your understanding of the concepts.** You do not need to translate the concept itself into your own words; so you could, for example, talk about 'colonialism' but the explanation should be in your own words

PART II: AN EVALUATIVE VOICE (approx. 2 pages)



Evaluate and assess the arguments, claims, and conclusions presented in this text. For this section, do not summarize the author's arguments. You have already done a summary in the annotation. You are also no longer speaking in the author's voice but in your own evaluative voice, using analysis and critical thinking to assess the arguments. The length of the article or how easy it is to read are not relevant to this kind of evaluation; rather, you are trying to evaluate the arguments and conclusions.

For both Part II and III, you may use the first person ('I') when you are presenting your own views in argumentation.

Here are the kinds of questions you **might** answer in order to develop your evaluation.

- Does the evidence adequately support the arguments and conclusions? Why or why not? Give some examples. Consider the facts, observations, experiences, examples, theories, concepts and research the author puts forward to support her claims.
- Are there weak points or gaps in reasoning? Questions left unanswered? Does the author acknowledge these problems? Explain with specific reference to the article.
- What assumptions does the author make? Are these stated or implied? Are they valid or do they weaken the argument? Assumptions are those aspects of an author's argument that are taken-for-granted rather than analyzed and defended. Sometimes the author is very explicit about these assumptions and other times you need to be an active reader to identify unspoken assumptions guiding the argument.
- Identify areas where the arguments are persuasive and explain why. Identify areas where the arguments are not persuasive and explain why.

COMMON THINKING ERRORS [Adapted from Research Roadmap at www.info.library.yorku.ca/roadmap]

(This part can be used as a supplement to Part II; if your students have already studied Fallacies, this part is not necessary.)

Logical fallacies: conclusions that do not follow from the arguments (for ex. because A precedes B, it necessarily causes B).



Appeals to emotion in lieu of reasoning

- **Ad hominum arguments:** arguing against the person making the argument rather than the argument itself.
- **Ethnocentrism:** the belief in the inherent superiority of one's own group, culture, language, religion, or race; and also the tendency to view and judge other culture or groups in terms of one's own.
- **Stereotyping:** This involves everyday beliefs that are accepted without question. Stereotypes assume that all members of a particular group have certain key characteristics in common and will behave in certain predictable ways. Generalizations and judgments are often based on a person's race, sexuality, gender, class, or ability.
- **Assumptions and speculations:** assumptions take something for granted; speculations make an educated guess, based on partial evidence.
- **Hasty conclusions:** arriving at a judgment before obtaining sufficient evidence.

PART III: A PERSONAL VOICE (approx. 2 pages)

Examine your personal responses to this material and reflect on challenges to your beliefs and values.

In preparation for writing this section, re-read the article and place an X in the margin at each point where your attitudes or beliefs are challenged, and a Y at those points where you agree with the argument.

1) Consider your views on this subject matter prior to reading the article. Explore the origins of these views: When, where and from whom did you learn these ideas? Have your views changed as a result of reading this material? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?

It is important to judge an argument on its own merits and not allow your biases and preconceptions to interfere with your evaluation. One way to prevent your biases from interfering with your evaluation is to become self-conscious about these biases, to articulate them clearly and to evaluate them.

2) Identify and “problematize” your emotional responses to the issues raised in these texts. Your responses might include anger, confusion, ambivalence, discomfort, excitement, surprise, resistance, denial, enthusiasm, etc. Ask yourself why you feel this way, that is, “problematize” (explain and assess) your feelings rather than just describing them.



In Part III of the assignment, you are no longer analyzing the text, but rather you are 'investigating' your own responses to the issues raised in the texts. As in Part II, you are speaking in your own voice, but you have shifted to an explicitly personal and reflective perspective. This means that there are no right answers; however, you are not being asked for a 'personal opinion' about the subject matter but rather to critically analyze your responses to the material. The major factor taken into consideration in marking this section will be your ability to identify, "problematize," and reflect on your pre-existing beliefs and emotional responses to the material.

An **A** paper will be elegantly written, well-organized, and without spelling and grammar mistakes. It will carefully address all parts of the assignment. It will have a thoughtful introduction and conclusion. It will demonstrate an understanding of the material, and an ability to identify the main arguments. It will offer complex evaluations of and personal reflections on the material. **Do not confuse length with quality.**

- TOTAL LENGTH: 6 pages typed double spaced.
- HAND IN THE ORIGINAL AND KEEP A COPY FOR YOURSELF. THIS IS FOR YOUR PROTECTION.
- DUE: (Teacher will specify)
- Grade: (Teacher will specify__% of your final grade)

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

Before you hand in your assignment, use this checklist to ensure that you have followed all instructions. This checklist is also used as a reference point for grading your assignment. If you find problem areas, revise before you hand in the assignment.

- a) Do you have an introduction? It should be brief but outline to your reader what you are doing in the assignment.
- b) Check the length of your annotation. It should be no more than one page. If you have used any quotations in the annotation, remove them. Summarize **in your own words**.
- c) Have you identified and explained **key** concepts?
- d) In your evaluation of the texts (Part II), be sure that you have not simply stated an opinion. Rather you need to analyze the construction of the arguments. Are your assertions supported by evidence?
- e) When you speak in a personal voice (Part III), have you **problematized** your feelings? Understanding your emotional responses will improve your critical reading skills.
- f) Have you distinguished among the three voices: the author's voice, an evaluative voice, and a personal voice? Remove any overlap or repetition between sections.
- g) Do you have a concluding statement? This should sum up what you have learned as a result of doing this assignment.
- h) Is your writing clear, well organized, and coherent?
- i) Have you used sub-headings to indicate the separate sections of the paper?



- k) Have you corrected all typing, spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors? Do not rely on spell check programs on the computer.
- l) Is your assignment the required length?



How to Structure an Argument

Instead of an outline of topics, consider using this classical Greek rhetorical outline by functions. Note that some of these points might take several paragraphs.

1. Opening – The Introduction

To build credible ethos, to demonstrate to the audience that one is a reasonable person of good will who shares core beliefs with the audience (warrants). Some classic openings include:

- a quotation
- a question
- an anecdote

2. Providing Background Information

Arguments need to situate the reader with historical background. If the argument is about lowering the drinking age, provide information about how and why and why the drinking age was set to where it is now. This should include information as to differences by localities, particularly if the argument is going to proceed by parallel cases – i.e. "in Germany... therefore in America..." Some of the statistics can be saved for the Proof section.

3. Defining the terms and explaining the issues

Continuing the above example, tell the reader "What is meant by drinking age?"

"What are the consequences?" "Consequences for whom?" Just do NOT directly state: In this paper, I will show... or this paper is about...

These are errors that reduce the sophistication of the writer in the eyes of readers.

4. Presenting the thesis

The argument's claim – particularly for a deliberative argument about policy (i.e. what should be done) -- plus reasons.

5. Giving Proof

This includes statistics, examples, quotes, and any other evidence to persuade a reader of the validity of the thesis. The ordering of these should match the reasons given in the thesis statement. Thus if the thesis is that "More nuclear power plants should be built because nuclear power is cheaper and reduces dependence on foreign oil" then the proof of cheapness comes before the proof of dependence on foreign oil. However, it is generally agreed that if some of the arguments/proofs are stronger than others, then one should start and end with strong ones and sandwich the weaker arguments in the middle.

6. Answering opposing arguments.

Specific arguments must be provided (with speakers' names etc) and then refuted (or acknowledged but dismissed as not sufficiently pressing), whether by challenging the speaker's



factual accuracy, logic, or expertise. If no opposition is found, consider whether the argument is really a debatable point. Sometimes hypothetical "critics" can be alleged: "Critics might charge that..., but...". However, for this assignment, actual opposition must be found and cited.

7. Concluding

Sum up the points of the argument to show how the weight of evidence proves the thesis, while the opposition has been refuted.

Ideas from *Rhetoric in the Classical Tradition* by Winifred Bryan Horner. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. 232.

ACTIVE READING

Students are required to read a course text from beginning to end in order to prepare for class. Sadly a growing majority fails to realize when they begin to mentally wander. They often forget much of what they have read and are not really prepared to participate in discussion. An 'active' approach to reading, comprehending and truly digesting a text is critical. This means readers must seek out the internal logic of a text, identifying its strengths and weaknesses, and they must also develop a critical perspective on it. Following the suggestions in this guide will help students to develop these skills which are critical to high school and university success.

TIME MANAGEMENT AND READING

Most students seriously underestimate the time it takes to read and prepare course material.

In fact, reading is probably the most time-consuming and important of all the activities students will undertake. Not only must they allocate sufficient time to do their reading, but also they need to develop the critical skills that will help them process what they read.

Studies show that students think they ought to be able to read a page per minute, but in fact 4-6 minutes per page is a more realistic estimate. Have your students test themselves: for one of the course readings, ask them to estimate how long it will take them to read the chapter or section. Then tell students to time themselves.

The more they are aware of the time required, the better able they will be to plan effectively.

READING THE TEXT: MAKING NOTES, HIGHLIGHTING, AND SUMMARIZING

As students have proceeded through readings, they may have developed strategies to identify, mark, and summarize important information. The most popular way of marking key information is to highlight the text or underline passages to return to them later. In general, the **process of marking the text** is a good one. However, some students highlight too much and too quickly. As soon as they notice something important, they will begin marking. Students may not have actually read and processed the material, but they assume that once marked, they will return to it later. In truth, going back to it often **does not happen because the volume of highlighted material overwhelms students.**

A few suggestions to improve marking strategies.

1. Students should start by reading the introductory and concluding paragraphs.

This will prepare them for reading the more detailed argument and help them to understand the author's purpose.

TIP: If students have run out of time to complete all readings, they should read the introduction, titles, headings, subheadings, and conclusion in order to get a general sense about the text.

2. Read an entire section between headings before highlighting. In this way, students can see the development of the whole idea. They will probably find a concise re-statement of the author's argument toward the end which will be especially helpful in writing an annotation.

3. Instead of underlining or highlighting across the page, instruct them to use a **pencil to make a vertical mark along the margin**. This prevents interruption of their reading/thinking while still allowing them to identify that section for later consideration.

Using a pencil rather than a highlighter permits changes at a later date, and also allows students to write comments and questions on the text.

4. Instruct that they **circle any concepts** they come across. If they are unclear about the meaning of the concept, tell them to bring a query to class, or to a study group.

5. Suggest that they **use a question mark to identify any material they do not understand**. They should not be stopped by confusion. Often material at a later point will clarify.

When students have difficulties with a reading, they often think the problem is because they are unable to understand it. However, sometimes the problem is a lack of clarity or confusion in the text itself. Learning to identify such weaknesses is key to being a successful university scholar.

6. Suggest that they **use an * to mark points that provoked, challenged and/or intrigued them**.

7. Explain that using their own words in the margin to explain briefly an idea or note its importance is more effective than using the words of the author.

Rephrasing ideas into their own words forces them to think the idea through and process its meaning.

ASKING QUESTIONS

Students often think that their role is to answer questions and that the role of teachers is to ask questions. **This is not true.**

The effective student is able to ask questions, not only of the teacher but also of the text (any written material). The effective student learns to act like the teacher, always asking questions.

The ability to ask questions is a test of their understanding of the material. It depends upon careful reading and comprehension and if the question is about a lecture, upon careful listening.

Asking questions depends upon their ability to pick out the most important ideas, to focus on the construction of the argument, to identify potentially weak links in the evidence, and to make associations with other knowledge that they have already acquired, that is, to make comparisons between texts. **Out of this question-asking process, they will develop their own point of view on the material -- a key to a successful student and a good scholar.**

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

Students should ask questions **before** they read a text in order to guide their reading. This will help them to focus their attention on what they are reading and, in particular, to pick out the main ideas. While they are reading, they should be looking for the answers to their questions. Pre-reading is part of a process of previewing a text. Before students begin to read or formulate questions, they should look through an article, read the introduction, the headings, and the concluding paragraph. Then, they are ready to formulate pre-reading questions. These can be generated by looking over the chapter headings and subheadings (or topic sentences) before they begin reading.

For example, some of the subheadings in a reading on "Beauty, Status, and Aging" are:

Brief Historical Backdrop

Aging and Women's Differential Life Experience

Assumptions and Presumptions about Aging Women

Standards of Beauty

Beauty as a Constant

Beauty as Youth

Without knowing anything about the content of the chapter, students could ask the following questions:

- -What is the historical background for current views about beauty, status, and aging (from the title of article)?
- -What is the relationship between women's life experience and their patterns of aging?
- -What assumptions are made about aging women?
- -What are the standards of beauty in our society?
- -What does it mean to talk about 'beauty as a constant'?
- -What is the relation between beauty and youth?

Generating helpful guiding questions is not difficult, and they will help direct student reading. When asking these kinds of questions, it is usually a good idea for students to work with a small portion of the text. If they have a book to read, they should ask questions for each chapter, or better yet, for each section of a chapter. Answers to these questions provide a framework for taking notes on the text, and also a useful mechanism to self-test later. If they cannot answer one of their pre-reading questions, they know to bring the question up in class for further clarification.

AFTER YOU READ THE TEXT

After students read the text and have answered their pre-reading questions, they need to step back from the details of the material and make some assessments.

Tell them to do the following things:

1. Ask yourself if you have understood the material. Are there any words, ideas, concepts, or arguments in the chapter/article that you did not understand?

Formulate specific questions to bring to your tutorial.

The more specific the questions you ask of your teachers and classmates, the more willing and able they will be to respond to them. **For example**, a student who says to a teacher, "I don't understand the chapter" will get a less positive response than a student who says, "I don't understand the argument on pp. 10-11." **Why is this the case?**

2. Answer the following questions:

- What questions are the authors trying to answer?
- What is the authors' main point/argument? Why is it important?
- What is the method of data collection and analysis?
- What are the key supporting details and evidence? Any weaknesses in the argument?
- Does the evidence support the conclusions?
- What do the authors take-for-granted, that is, what assumptions do they make? Have they left any unanswered questions?
- In what ways do you agree/disagree with the point of view, the argument, and the conclusions?
- How does this text compare with the other texts on the same topic? Do all authors make the same argument?
- What areas of disagreement? Who is more persuasive?
- What have you learned? How have your views changed as a result of reading this material?

STUDY/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Sometimes teachers will develop study questions to help guide student reading and focus tutorial discussion. Unlike pre-reading questions, they are based on a prior reading of the text and so are more specific and detailed.

DEGREES OF DIFFICULTY

There are different levels of study/discussion questions, each of which involves different skills and different degrees of difficulty. For each reading assignment, students should write a level 2/3/4 question.

Level One: Level One questions involve recognition and recall, that is, being able to locate and reproduce pieces of factual information. In general, level one questions ask, "What did the author say?" For example, "To what occupational categories do most women workers belong?" Usually there is only one right answer to this level of question. Most higher-level high school and university assignments will not ask Level One assignments.

Level Two: Level Two questions require a greater contribution on the part of the learner than merely locating or recognizing directly stated information. Level Two questions ask, "What did the author mean?" The reader must be able to comprehend and interpret the material, not just recall it. Level Two questions ask readers to identify and explain concepts and the logic of arguments. For example, "Explain the concept of the feminization of poverty." Or "How does the author explain the increase in the number of women who are poor?"

Level Three: Level Three questions involve the learner in analyzing facts and inferences. This type of critical comprehension requires the reader to apply, analyze, and synthesize material. It may involve evaluation of the material as well as the integration of material from several sources. For example, "Evidence suggests that older women are seriously devalued in our society? Do you agree? Why or why not?" Or "Draw out the connections between the devaluation of older women and the problems that younger women face around body image."

Level Four: Level Four questions ask the learner to utilize new information in original ways. This level of understanding requires the greatest contribution on the part of the learner.

Questions of this kind could be called `creative comprehension

questions' or 'complex problem solving.' For example, "Toronto faces serious problems around the issue of racism and sexism. Readers must use concepts from course readings to explain why these problems are occurring. They will need to develop an action plan to address these problems."

QUESTIONS ABOUT PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND ATTITUDES

Some questions are less analytical in their focus. They may draw on personal experience and attitudes. These questions ask learners whether the arguments and presentation in the texts are consistent with their own experience and whether the readings have expanded or shifted their understanding of that experience. Other questions may ask about emotional responses to material: discomfort, anger, excitement, resistance, denial, enthusiasm etc.

ASKING QUESTIONS TO PREPARE FOR TESTS AND EXAMS

A student who has learned the course material should be able to anticipate the questions that will be asked on tests/exams.

Teachers do not design tests to trick students or on the basis of any obscure principles, but rather to test students' knowledge of the material. Since it is not possible to cover all areas, teachers will tend to ask questions about the most important material. Students who can identify and understand the most important material will also be able to predict the test questions. These anticipated questions can be the basis for student test preparation. Self-testing is a very successful studying strategy and can help reduce test anxiety. When students are preparing for tests/exams, they should try to find out what level of questions their teachers intend to ask. It is obvious that university tests and exams do not rely on Level One questions of recognition and recall. Thus students have to adjust their studying to prepare for the other kinds of questions. For example, memorization will only help them prepare to answer Level One questions; the other three levels of questions involve an increasing degree of understanding and creativity.

Content strategies noted here are based on the studies and development of documents created by Linda Briskin, 2005.