

What Do Good Readers Do?

What Can You Do to Become a Better Reader?

Before Reading

Set a Purpose for Reading

Think if you will you be reading to find out what happens in a story or to learn specific information.

Preview the Text

Look at the title, pictures, captions under pictures, headings, bold-faced print and other graphics.

Activate Background Knowledge

Think about what you already know about the content of what you will read.

Predict

Think what might happen in the story, what words may be used, or what information the text might contain.

During Reading

Cross-check

Check one cue with another. Ask yourself, "Does this word look right, sound right, and make sense?"

Reread

When problems occur, return to the beginning of a sentence or paragraph and read it again.

Predict and Confirm

Ask yourself, "What word do I expect to see?", "What do I think will happen next?", "Did that make sense?", or "Am I finding the answers to my questions about this topic?"

Skip, Read On, and Go Back

Sometimes you can skip an unfamiliar word and read to the end of the sentence or paragraph, thinking about what would make sense. Then, using the context, go back and reread to try to determine the word.

Connect Background Knowledge to the Information in the Text

Think about what you already know about the subject and the kind of material you are reading. Think about how the information is similar to what you already know about the topic, event, or person. If you have many questions about the topic or the kind of book, you may need to ask someone for help.

Think About Explicit and Implicit Information

Think about what information is given directly. Also think about what you know from reading that is not directly stated in words such as how a character's actions show feelings or why things may have happened based on the clues the author gave.

Stop and Review

If you are reading a longer text, stop and think about what has happened in the story so far or what information has been given.

After Reading

Retell and Summarize

Tell someone or write what happened in the story, including characters, plot, and important events. If you read a nonfiction piece, review what information was presented.

Use a Graphic Organizer

Use a story map, biography wheel, Venn diagram, or other way to show what was included in what you read. (You may need to check with your teacher for suggestions.)

Draw Conclusions

Think about what predictions you made before and during reading. Look back and think about what you have read. Consider how the information read relates to what you already knew about the topic. Were your questions answered? Do you have more questions about the subject?

Reread

Reread the text or a section of the text to help you understand it better.

Discuss and Respond

Talk with someone about what you have read. Ask each other questions. Look back at the book to defend your opinions.

Write to Support Understanding

Write about what you have read, telling what it made you think of or what you learned.

CRITICAL READING STRATEGIES

Here I present seven critical reading strategies that I have borrowed from someone else. These are strategies that you can learn readily and then apply not only to the reading selections in this class, but also to your other college reading. Although mastering these strategies will not make the critical reading process an easy one, it can make reading much more satisfying and productive and thus help you handle difficult material well and with confidence.

Fundamental to each of these strategies is annotating directly on the page: underlining key words, phrases, or sentences; writing comments or questions in the margins; bracketing important sections of the text; constructing ideas with lines or arrows; numbering related points in sequence; and making note of anything that strikes you as interesting, important, or questionable.

Most readers annotate in layers, adding further annotations on second and third readings. Annotations can be light or heavy, depending on the reader's purpose and the difficulty of the material.

Previewing: *Learning about a text before really reading it.*

Previewing enables readers to get a sense of what the text is about and how it is organized before reading it closely. This simple strategy includes seeing what you can learn from the headnotes or other introductory material, skimming to get an overview of the content and organization, and identifying the rhetorical situation.

Contextualizing: *Placing a text in its historical, biographical, and cultural contexts.*

When you read a text, you read it through the lens of your own experience. Your understanding of the words on the page and their significance is informed by what you have come to know and value from living in a particular time and place. But the texts you read were all written in the past, sometimes in a radically different time and place. To read critically, you need to contextualize, to recognize the differences between your contemporary values and attitudes and those represented in the text.

Questioning to understand and remember: *Asking questions about the content.*

As students, you are accustomed (I hope) to teachers asking you questions about your reading. These questions are designed to help you understand a reading and respond to it more fully, and often this technique works. When you need to understand and use new information though it is most beneficial if you write the questions, as you read the text for the first time. With this strategy, you can write questions any time, but in difficult academic readings, you will understand the material better and remember it longer if you write a question for every paragraph or brief section. Each question should focus on a main idea, not on illustrations or details, and each should be expressed in your own words, not just copied from parts of the paragraph.

Reflecting on challenges to your beliefs and values: *Examining your personal responses.*

The reading that you do for this class might challenge your attitudes, your unconsciously held beliefs, or your positions on current issues. As you read a text for the first time, mark an X in the margin at each point where you felt a personal challenge to your attitudes, beliefs, or status. Make a brief note in the margin about what you feel or about what in the text created the challenge. Now look again at the places you marked in the text where you felt personally challenged. What patterns do you see?

Outlining and summarizing: *Identifying the main ideas and restating them in your own words.* Outlining and summarizing are especially helpful strategies for understanding the content and structure of a reading selection. Whereas outlining reveals the basic structure of the text, summarizing synthesizes a selection's main argument in brief. Outlining may be part of the annotating process, or it may be done separately (as it is in this class). The key to both outlining and summarizing is being able to distinguish between the main ideas and the supporting ideas and examples. The main ideas form the backbone, the strand that hold the various parts and pieces of the text together. Outlining the main ideas helps you to discover this structure. When you make an outline, don't use the text's exact words.

Summarizing begins with outlining, but instead of merely listing the main ideas, a summary recomposes them to form a new text. Whereas outlining depends on a close analysis of each paragraph, summarizing also requires creative synthesis. Putting ideas together again -- in your own words and in a condensed form -- shows how reading critically can lead to deeper understanding of any text.

Evaluating an argument: *Testing the logic of a text as well as its credibility and emotional impact.* All writers make assertions that want you to accept as true. As a critical reader, you should not accept anything on face value but to recognize every assertion as an argument that must be carefully evaluated. An argument has two essential parts: a claim and support. The claim asserts a conclusion -- an idea, an opinion, a judgment, or a point of view -- that the writer wants you to accept. The support includes reasons (shared beliefs, assumptions, and values) and evidence (facts, examples, statistics, and authorities) that give readers the basis for accepting the conclusion. When you assess an argument, you are concerned with the process of reasoning as well as its truthfulness (these are not the same thing). At the most basic level, in order for an argument to be acceptable, the support must be appropriate to the claim and the statements must be consistent with one another.

Comparing and contrasting related readings: *Exploring likenesses and differences between texts to understand them better.*

Many of the authors we read are concerned with the same issues or questions, but approach how to discuss them in different ways. Fitting a text into an ongoing dialectic helps increase understanding of why an author approached a particular issue or question in the way he or she did.

Strategies for Reading a Narrative

1. Depending on the narrative type:

For a written text: **take careful notes as you read**, jotting down whatever you might think is important. Mark in the text (if it's not a library book) or make notes on a separate sheet of paper. After you finish each reading session, take a few moments to think about what you've just read, and brainstorm for any possible ideas, significance, etc.

For a visual narrative: while watching the movie, **briefly** jot down scenes and images that strike you as important (but don't spend much time writing at this point-watch the film!).

2. Immediately after finishing the narrative, write for about 15 minutes on everything that comes to your mind. These can be personal reactions, observations, and interpretations of what you've just seen. Write down questions you have about the narrative, ones that you may want to bring up in a class discussion.

3. Some things to consider while writing your post-reading/viewing notes:

Narrative structure - what happens in the narrative and how the story is told.

Themes, ideas, values - anything major concerning human and cultural issues expressed in the narrative; or in other words, what you think the narrative is about.

Characterization - what the characters are like, how they are depicted (positively, negatively, mixture?), what their importance is in the narrative.

Setting - the characters' environments and the symbolic importance they may have.

Writing - important lines, dialogue significant to the narrative's theme(s).

Technique - the significance of writing style (the way the author uses words and the particular words used) in written texts or the camera movement and editing in film.

Overall impression - what you thought of the narrative and why. Try to go beyond the labels "good" or "bad." Express **why** you did or didn't like it and define what you mean by "good" or "bad." Please bring your notes to class so that you may refer to them during our discussions. All of this should help you to sharpen your memory and your ability to be a critical reader.

Spelling Strategies

What Do Good Spellers Do?

How Can You Be a Better Speller?

Stretching out Words / Using Phonics

Ask yourself, "What sounds do I hear when I say this word very slowly?" Upper grade students use this strategy mostly with words that have more than one syllable, especially compound words or words with known prefixes and suffixes.

Applying Knowledge of Word / Letter Patterns

Ask yourself, "What other words do I know that can help me spell this word?" For example, if you know how to spell paw, you would also spell straw or dawn.

Applying Knowledge of the Background of Words

Ask yourself, "What words or word parts are similar in other words that will help me to spell this word?" For example, if you know how to spell revolt, it would help you in spelling related words such as revolting, revolution, and revolutionary.

Using "Have-a-Go" (Using Visual Information)

Write the word and ask yourself, "Does this word look right?" If it doesn't, try it again.

Applying Generalizations

Ask yourself, "How does what I have learned help me spell new words?" For example, you can learn how to use ing or learn that /shun/ can be spelled cian, tion, or sion.

Using a Memory Aid

Ask yourself, "How can I remember how this word is spelled?" For example, hear - I can hear with my ear, or friend - She is my friend to the end.

Editing

As you read through a piece of writing you have completed, ask yourself, "Is my writing spelled correctly?" You may want to circle any words you think are not spelled correctly so that you can check them.

Using Resources

When writing, ask yourself, "Where have I seen this word before?" or "Where can I find how to spell this word?" Use dictionaries, fiction and nonfiction books, personal word lists, class charts, learning logs, or electronic spell-checking tools.