Developing Critical Reading Strategies

Goals

This workshop focuses on the skills and strategies a reader can develop to improve efficiency and comprehension, particularly when working with difficult texts. The first fifteen minutes will consist of reviewing the key terms and concepts, and the preparatory activity, from these pre-workshop materials, which student attendees are expected to read and complete in advance (the workshop is not a teacher-centered lesson in rules). Following that brief review, in the remaining thirty minutes, students will dynamically interact with each other and the Writing Center consultant while discussing the tools and techniques for reading and how to refine them.

Materials Needed

In order to participate fully in the workshop, bring the following:

- A laptop or tablet with wireless internet capability (to access these materials during the workshop)
- Your completed preparatory exercises (see “Preparatory Activity” below)
- If you have a reading assignment you find challenging, consider bringing it to the workshop, and we may be able to consider it as an example during the workshop.

Topic Overview

Developing critical reading skills is imperative for success in college. Understanding one’s own reading processes, one’s own reading challenges, and the strategies available for addressing those challenges will contribute to one’s development as a stronger reader. In understanding those reading processes, it is important to recognize that readers are also problem solvers. Every obstacle they encounter is a point at which they must make a decision on how to proceed, so readers must determine which strategies are most effective for them.

To avoid feeling lost in a difficult text, a helpful strategy is to preview and anticipate its general aim or direction. While some readers choose to use a highlighter, this is usually ineffective and is not a component of active reading. Instead, annotation, or using a pen or pencil to make marginal notes, is more beneficial during and after reading. In reading a longer text, it is useful to pause occasionally and confirm one’s active reading; this can be done by stopping periodically to summarize and analyze what has been read.

Key Terms and Concepts

- **Preview**: Especially useful with a difficult text, this involves reading the organizing headers and skimming through the entire piece to determine its scope and trajectory.
- **Active Reading**: This involves an invested reader who, rather than trying to absorb a text, is engaged in a conversation with it. Active reading can also include asking pre-reading questions, reading with a purpose, and making connections among the ideas in the text. To keep the mind actively involved when reading, it is important to avoid distracting surroundings and passive positions, such as lying down.
- **Annotation**: This is not simply taking notes; rather, it requires interaction with a text. Annotation includes identifying key ideas, noting where one agrees or disagrees with an author or argument, marking where one
does not understand a point or passage, and finding definitions for unfamiliar terms (relying on context clues instead of finding definitions can sometimes cause misinterpretation of a text). An additional benefit of annotation is that they can be read later to review a text, whereas highlighted material offers no indication of why a section was marked.

- **Summarize and Analyze:** One way to ensure understanding is to summarize the main idea of a text. This can be done in the margin with a short phrase that captures dense or difficult passages and explains them in one’s own words. Analysis involves evaluating what was read and determining its credibility, validity, and value, along with the logic and strength of its evidence.

**Additional Resources**

- More information on active reading can be found at Princeton University’s McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning.
- For guidelines on close reading, follow this link for Purdue OWL’s suggestions.

**Preparatory Activity**

Prior to the workshop, please print and complete this Reading Process Survey, which will help you get a better idea of your reading process and your personal roadblocks. Bring the survey with you to the workshop, and be prepared to discuss your results. To prepare for the discussion, please consider the following questions:

1. Were your scores roughly equal across all three categories of Reading Strategies, or were you weaker in some area(s) than others? Were the results a surprise to you, or were they in alignment with your expectations regarding your reading process?
2. Review the reading strategies presented in the survey. Which strategies do you personally find most beneficial, and which the least? Are there any additional strategies, techniques or tips that you use during your own reading process that you could share with the other workshop participants?
3. Readers typically use different strategies when reading for different purposes. Within the academic discourse community, what are some of the different purposes behind your reading, and how does your reading strategy differ depending on the purpose? How does your reading strategy differ depending on the stage of the reading process?
4. What are the primary challenge(s) you have faced with the reading you have been assigned for your classes?

After taking the Reading Process survey and working through the questions above, read the paragraph below, excerpted from Pierre Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977). Imagine your teacher has assigned you to present a clear explanation of this passage to the class tomorrow. As you read, please note the challenges that you encounter in understanding the text, and what strategies you would use as a reader to overcome these roadblocks to comprehension. You should print the paragraph and feel free to mark up your copy – underlining phrases or passages, circling, making margin comments and annotations, etc. – as you work to fully comprehend the passage. Please bring your annotated copy of the paragraph with you to the workshop.

**Structures and the Habitus**

One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a commonsense world endowed with the objectivity secured by consensus on the meaning (sens) of practices and
the world, in other words that each of them receives from the expression, individual and collective (in festivals, for example), improvised or programmed (commonplaces, sayings), of similar or identical experiences. The homogeneity of habitus is what--within the limits of the group of agents possessing the schemes (of production and interpretation) implied in their production--causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted. This practical observation obviates the "intentional" and the "intentional transfer into the Other" dear to phenomenologists by dispensing, for the ordinary occasions of life, with close analysis of the nuances of another's practice and tacit or explicit inquiry ("What do you mean?") into his intentions (p.80).