How to Read Like a Graduate Student

USC Writing Center

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Before reading anything, ask yourself three questions:

1. What am I reading?
2. Why am I reading this?
3. When I am reading, how can I maximize retention and minimize physical/psychological strain?

**The “Stasis” Questions**

**Existence**: Does this exist? or Is this happening?

“I crunched (or generated) a bunch of data to prove that this phenomenon or process exists.”

“I used (or invented) a theory/methodology/model to interpret data, thus proving that this phenomenon or process exists.”

“I used/generated data/theory to demonstrate that this phenomenon or process does not exist.”

“Specialists in my field do not agree as to whether this phenomenon or process exists. I used/generated data/methodology to weigh in on the debate.”

**Definition**: What is this? or How should we classify this?

“I believe we should classify this object as belonging to that category.”

“I believe we should classify this object as belonging to that category, which gives us a better understanding of the object.”

“I believe we should classify this object as belonging to that category, which gives us a richer/more challenging definition of the category.”

“I believe we should invent/combine categories to classify this object/phenomenon.”

**Cause**: How does this process work? or What caused this?

“I crunched/generated data to understand why X happened or how Z works.”

“I used/created a methodology to understand why X happened or how Z works.”

“I used/created data/methodology to determine whether there is a causal relationship between X and Y.”

“Specialists in my field do not agree on/understand the workings of X. I analyzed/generated data or I used/created a methodology to move the conversation forward.”

**Evaluation**: Is this good? or Should we pay more/different kinds of attention to this?

“We should pay more attention to X because it’s actually compelling/revealing/important.”

“We should pay more attention to X because it’s an example of Y.” [**evaluation + classification**]

**Proposal**: What should we do about this? or How can we move toward a solution to this problem?

“X should do Y.”

“I used/generated data/methodology [**existence, cause**] that suggests we should do X.” [**proposal**]

**Sample Abstracts**

What stasis question(s) are implied by the following abstract? Is the author making an argument about….

Existence (does this exist? or is this happening?)

Definition (what is this? or how should we classify it?)

Evaluation (is it good?)

Cause (what caused it? or how does it work?)

Proposals (what should we do about it?)

This essay engages a new iteration of racial kitsch, the anthropomorphic Asian object. Unlike ethnic Halloween costumes, American Indian mascots, and mammy cookie jars, these mundane household items evade recognition as racist caricature through their aesthetic form, kawaii or cute-style. This essay explores the association between racial caricature and harm through the ambivalent affective responses evoked by cute things. Arguing that kawaii Asian proxies allow for the enjoyment of unequal relations of power, the essay looks at the ways in which racial things veil anxieties surrounding globalization and economic competition. It explores the vacillation between pleasure and pain underlying Asian American spectatorship of “racist cute” things to test coalition as a community of shared feeling. Interrogating racial pleasures as they circulate through the nonhuman, the essay situates racial stereotyping as a desiring structure that complicates the framework of offensive versus inoffensive representation and gestures toward its analogue, racial profiling.

“Racist Cute: Caricature, Kawaii-Style, and the Asian Thing,” by Leslie Bow