

CM107M1 Reading – Part 2

Practical Strategies for Reading and Writing

Audience and Purpose

So who is my audience?

Identifying your audience will depend on such factors as the nature of the writing (are you writing a letter to a friend, an essay for a class, or a glossary for coworkers?) and what you hope to accomplish, the purpose.

But isn't the professor my audience?

Well, yes and no. Yes, in the sense that your professor will be reading your work to evaluate what you are able to accomplish and to offer feedback to help you improve upon your skills and understanding, but that does not mean that what you are trying to say in a piece of writing is targeted for your professor. If you were writing about a problem in your department in the workplace and proposing suggestions for improvement, would your professor be an appropriate audience? Certainly not. Who would be the target for such a piece of writing? Your direct supervisor would make sense. And coworkers within the department. There may also be other, secondary audiences, perhaps supervisors in all departments or your direct supervisor's boss. In this example, however, it is clear that your professor would not be part of your audience, right?

Understanding your audience is paramount to your success in communicating meaning. Beyond this general purpose of communicating meaning to an audience, you will have a more defined purpose that speaks to the reason why you are writing, your goal. Perhaps your purpose is to explain a process, or to argue your opinion on a debatable topic; perhaps your purpose is to summarize an article, to tell a story, or to complain about bad service at a local eatery. Whenever you write, you always do so to accomplish something in particular, a purpose. Otherwise, why write?

When you write not only do you need to think about who you are writing to, your audience, but you also have to think about why you are writing, your purpose – the two are inextricable, impossible to separate. So, the next time you write, be sure to plan accordingly and think carefully about your audience and purpose.

Critical Reading Techniques

Reading Critically Research and reading are among the key factors that distinguish college-level writing from that of precollege writing. As has been discussed, a college-level writer must employ critical-thinking skills throughout the writing process. This concept of digging below the surface extends to reading as well. A critical reader does not just read words on a page and accept them at face value. Instead, the critical reader pushes deeper to analyze the text. Here are some questions to consider when reading critically:

- What are the author's biases?

- Is the argument presented valid?
- Is the argument adequately supported?
- Are supporting sources reliable?
- Does the author use faulty reasoning?
- Does the author consider and/or refute alternative perspectives?

Critical readers are active readers, and active readers engage with the text. Like critical thinking, critical-reading skills can be honed. You can employ a number of strategies to improve your critical-reading skills and become a more active reader.

Previewing

Previewing is a quick review of an article with the intent of identifying the general purpose and main points of the piece. Previewing an article allows the reader to complete additional, deeper readings with purpose. A preview often generates questions that you can then use to guide your second reading.

When previewing an article, you should start by skimming the article, noting the title and subheadings to get an idea of the organization of the work. You should also review any tables, graphs, or other visual aids if present. Finally, read the abstract or introductory paragraph as well as the concluding paragraph. If the article includes an author biography, review that as well. Information about the author can clue you in to potential biases and should not be overlooked.

Reviewing

A review is similar to a preview; it should focus on the same areas you focused on during that exercise. Take a second look at the passages you highlighted during your annotated reading and review any notes or questions you included in the margins. If your preview generated questions, check to see if they were answered during your annotated reading.

Outlining

You might have learned to outline as a prewriting technique but it also can assist you as a critical reader. Instead of building an outline to guide your writing, you are deconstructing the article and putting it into a simplified visual format. This technique offers a few advantages. First, it tests your comprehension of the article's thesis and main points by challenging you to restate them in your own words. It also allows you to clearly see the structure of the article. Finally, it can alert you to missing information or poorly supported points.

Summarizing

Writing a summary of what you have read is a good way to test your comprehension of the material. However, like outlining, it can also assist you in spotting holes in an argument or gaps in presented research. A summary should include the central idea and supporting points of the article or reading. Take the time to put your summary down on paper so you can carefully review it, but do not worry about formatting or editing. This is a tool for you. Remember, a summary should be in your own words, just like the outline.