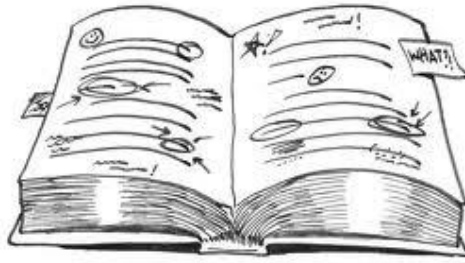


Active Reading

“Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.”
~Joseph Addison



Many people believe that by moving one's eyes over a piece of text slowly and carefully—in other words, by reading it—that they will automatically comprehend, learn, and remember the content of what they read. But, this could not be more incorrect. To be an effective reader who fully grasps what one reads, who thinks critically about it, and who is able to apply it their own life, you need to do more than sit passively with the book in your hand.

To be an effective reader, you need to be *actively* engaged and involved with the text in front of you. This is no different from the rest of your life. Consider this: do you most effectively learn a musical instrument or a sport by watching someone else play, or by actively working at it and practicing yourself?

Similarly, effective reading is a mental process that requires you to *actively* interact with the text by **identifying, clarifying, making connections, synthesizing, evaluating, and creating new ideas**. This kind of reading is a skill, and becoming a successful active reader will require both an understanding of the purpose of this process and a commitment to incorporating into one's daily life.

- **Identifying**, as we are using it here, means to pick out the main ideas in the text you are reading, as well as any unfamiliar vocabulary terms.
- **Clarifying** means to define new terms and comprehends the meaning of the main ideas.
- **Making Connections** means to show you understand how different main ideas in the text relate to one another, and also to link these ideas to other reading you have done, to other Core classes, to personal experiences, etc.
- **Synthesizing** means to take all the information you have read and critically examined and put it together as a meaningful whole.
- **Evaluating** means to think critically about what you are reading and reason out what to accept or reject from the author's claims.
- **Creating** means to compose a personalized argument that supports a new meaning of the material.

To help train yourself to be an active reader, there are several things you will be asked to do. To start, you'll need 3 colored pens:

Red Pen: Identifying/Clarifying Key Terms

As you are reading, use red pen to circle or underline vocabulary terms. These can include both words that are unfamiliar to you, and essential key words that a reader needs to know in order to understand the text.

- Once you have identified unfamiliar and key vocabulary terms, define them in the margins. Make sure it's clear which definition goes with which word (an arrow can work well for this).
- If you've looked up a word but you're still unclear about what the author means in that particular sentence or passage, try *defining the word in context*. In other words, try rewriting the sentence in your own words using the definition (or synonyms) you found.
- It is always important to "double check" that you understand the meaning of the words in a passage. Even if you think you understand all of the vocabulary in a text, identifying and defining the words that are most essential to the author's main ideas will help you think more clearly and deeply about what the author is trying to communicate.

Blue Pen: Identifying/Clarifying Main Ideas

Blue pen should be used to identify the main ideas in a section of the reading.

- Underline key words or phrases that you think are the main and most important ideas the author wants to get across. The purpose is not to underline everything! You should be focused on identifying only what is most essential.
- When you underline, you must paraphrase *in your own words* what the author is saying in the margins. This is the step that will help clarify your understanding; underlining alone accomplishes nothing. Remember that this is a summary, meaning that it should be brief (just a few words or a phrase). You are *not* rewriting the whole passage here!
- Identifying the main ideas in a reading does not necessarily mean you need to summarize each paragraph. You should identify the main ideas when:
 - ✓ You don't understand what the author is saying. (Often the process of paraphrasing helps clarify, especially when paired with the vocabulary work of your red pen!)
 - ✓ You come across a passage that is essential to understanding the whole text.
 - ✓ The author presents a new idea.

Black Pen: Responding/Analyzing Main Ideas

Black pen is for analyzing and responding to the text. Underline the part of the text you want to respond to, and then use the space in the margin to make your notes. These kinds of annotations can include:

- *Clarifying Questions* (i.e. a question that can be supported with a factual answer). A good active reader might pause and research the answer, and come back and annotate the text once they've found it.
- *Analytical Questions* (i.e. a question that can help you to gain further insight into a text). A good active reader not only asks analytical questions, but also tries to answer them.
- Your *evaluation/opinion* of a particular passage or idea
- *Examples to support* the author's point
- *Examples or counter-arguments to refute* the author's point
- *Inferences or predictions* about what might happen next (in fiction) or what the author might say next (in a non-fiction text)
- *Connections* to other classes, texts, or personal experiences (Use your outside/prior knowledge to interact directly with ideas stated in the text!)