
Reading as a Writer

Reading and writing work together. Good writers draw ideas and information from their reading. They use reading to help understand an audience's likely reactions. They read to discover techniques of expression. They use critical reading as a springboard for their own writing. You can read for all of these purposes—understanding, critical response, and discovery of technique—or for only a few, depending on your goals as a writer. This book assumes that much of your attention will be devoted to two important purposes for writing, exposition and argument.

You encounter expository writing every day in many forms, including essays, magazine articles, reports, memos, newspaper reports, and nonfiction books. It brings facts and insights, helping writers and readers share experiences and understanding. You encounter argumentative writing in editorials and opinion essays, reports and proposals, policy statements and investigative reporting, and academic or professional articles. It focuses on differences but also provides reasons to agree with the writer's perspective.

To develop your skills as a reader and writer of expository and argumentative texts, you need to pay attention to three ways of approaching a text: reading for understanding, critical reading, and reading for technique. No matter what your approach, however, you need to pay attention to the elements of the reading process: previewing, reading, and reviewing.

THE READING PROCESS

If you plunge right into reading, moving quickly through an article, essay, or book and then put it aside, you are missing important opportunities. Effective readers treat reading as a process consisting of previewing, reading, and reviewing. They develop techniques for each of these stages of the reading process.

You can develop your ability to read critically and actively by employing strategies like those outlined in the following pages and applying them as you read the selections in this book (and on other occasions, too).

Previewing Strategies

Previewing means “reading before you start reading.” Newspapers provide headlines to tell you what to expect in an article. Books and articles have titles. Authors and editors often provide brief summaries at the beginning of a chapter or in a table of contents. Magazine editors often take key statements from an article and reprint them in large type within boxes where readers can see them as they flip through the pages. Paying attention to these features is important because the knowledge and expectation you bring to a text can affect how well you understand it and determine what you are able to draw from it. For example, reading an expository or argumentative essay without some idea of where it is going or what the writer intends is like following a complicated set of plans without any idea of what you are building.

Moreover, you can more readily understand the reasoning or information in an essay and evaluate the author's arguments and point of view when you already know something about the topic or issue. Previewing helps you bring to mind what you already know about a subject before you begin a careful reading of an essay. It helps you develop reasonable expectations for understanding and evaluating the paths an essay takes.

Strategy: Look for help from the editor or writer. Writers and editors often provide you with considerable help for previewing because they recognize its importance. The titles they choose are a good place to start. While some may be imaginative but not particularly helpful, others will tell you much about a work's contents and organization, as does the title of Don Aslett's book, *How*

Do I Clean the Moosehead? And 99 More Tough Questions About Housecleaning.

A table of contents provides detailed information about the coverage and purpose of a work and perhaps even a summary of individual sections of the work. The table of contents for this book, for example, offers brief summaries of the essay selections, identifying the general topic of each and the writer's perspective. Here, for instance, is the entry for Catherine Seipp's essay, "Meet Today's Dad."

A conservative writer takes a satiric look at "Today's Dad," contrasting the contemporary version with "Yesterday's Dad" and finding the traditional model (and traditional values) superior in a number of ways.

Once you know that Seipp writes from the perspective of the cultural and political right (the selection comes from the conservative website National Review Online), you can read her essay (pp. 189–193) with a greater appreciation of the origin and consequences of her ideas.

If an article or book does not have a table of contents, skim the text looking for headings and subheadings that reveal the writer's plan and the topics being discussed.

If an editor highlights important passages in an essay or article, pay attention to them. Here are three passages from an magazine article entitled "What Makes Sammy Walk?" that the editor chose to reprint in large type in the middle of a page.

Less than 70 percent of U.S. men are now full-time year-round workers.

"You don't have a social life," Dave's daughter says, "and you don't do anything."

"I just put in a proposal to cut my hours to thirty-two a week and take a 20 percent pay cut," says a woman. "It's been accepted. I'm so happy."

Strategy: Look for help from the context. The kind of magazine, scholarly journal, or newspaper in which an essay appears can tell you important things about its outlook. Some publications have a reputation for publishing articles with a particular social, cultural, or political point of view. Look for any statements of the periodical's editorial outlook. Pay attention to the magazine's title and to the titles of the other articles it contains.

For books, look at the back cover or dust jacket. They may provide a brief summary of the contents or the writer's outlook. They may also offer quotations from reviewers that highlight a book's main points.

Strategy: Practice your previewing skills. Use some or all of the techniques discussed in the preceding paragraphs to preview the essay that follows, Brent Staples's "Just Walk on By" (pp. 5–9).

BRENT STAPLES was born in 1951 in Chester, Pennsylvania. He received his B.A. in 1973 from Widener University and his Ph.D. (in psychology) in 1982 from the University of Chicago. He is a member of the New York Times editorial board, writing on matters of culture and society. He was formerly a reporter for the Chicago Sun Times and an editor of the New York Times Book Review. Staples is the author of *Parallel Time* (1994), a memoir.

Just Walk on By

The power of examples to enable a reader to see through someone else's eyes is evident in this selection. Though many of the examples in the essay draw on a reader's sympathy, their main purpose appears to be explanatory; hence, the author accompanies them with detailed discussions. The result is a piece that is both enlightening and moving.

My first victim was a woman—white, well dressed, probably in her early twenties. I came upon her late one evening on a deserted street in Hyde Park, a relatively affluent neighborhood in an otherwise mean, impoverished section of Chicago. As I swung onto the avenue behind her, there seemed to be a discreet, uninflamatory distance between us. Not so. She cast back a worried glance. To her, the youngish black man—a broad six feet two inches with a beard and billowing hair, both hands shoved into the pockets of a bulky military jacket—seemed menacingly close. After a few more quick glimpses, she picked up her pace and was soon running in earnest. Within seconds she disappeared into a cross street.

That was more than a decade ago. I was 22 years old, a graduate student newly arrived at the University of Chicago. It was in the echo of that terrified woman's footfalls that I first began to know the unwieldy inheritance I'd come into—the ability to alter public space in ugly ways. It was clear that she thought herself the quarry of a mugger, a rapist, or worse. Suffering a bout of insomnia, however, I was stalking sleep, not defenseless wayfarers. As a softy who is scarcely able to take a knife to a raw chicken—let alone hold it to a person's throat—I was surprised, embarrassed, and dismayed all at once. Her flight made me feel like an accomplice in tyranny. It also made it clear that I was indistinguishable from the muggers who occasionally seeped into the area from the surrounding ghetto. That first encounter, and those that followed, signified that a vast, unnerving gulf lay between nighttime pedestrians—particularly women—and me. And I soon gathered that being perceived as dangerous is a hazard in itself. I only needed to turn a corner into a dicey situation, or crowd some frightened, armed person in a foyer somewhere, or make an errant move after being pulled over by a

policeman. Where fear and weapons meet—and they often do in urban America—there is always the possibility of death.

In the first year, my first away from my hometown, I was to become thoroughly familiar with the language of fear. At dark, shadowy intersections in Chicago, I could cross in front of a car stopped at a traffic light and elicit the thunk, thunk, thunk, thunk of the driver—black, white, male, or female—hammering down the door locks. On less traveled streets after dark, I grew accustomed to but never comfortable with people who crossed to the other side of the street rather than pass me. Then there were the standard unpleasantness with police, doormen, bouncers, cab drivers, and others whose business it is to screen out troublesome individuals before there is any nastiness.

I moved to New York nearly two years ago and I have remained an avid night walker. In central Manhattan, the near-constant crowd cover minimized tense one-on-one street encounters. Elsewhere—visiting friends in SoHo, where sidewalks are narrow and tightly spaced buildings shut out the sky—things can get very taut indeed.

Black men have a firm place in New York mugging literature. Norman Podhoretz in his famed (or infamous) 1963 essay, “My Negro Problem—And Ours,” recalls growing up in terror of black males; they “were tougher than we were, more ruthless,” he writes—and as an adult on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, he continues, he cannot constrain his nervousness when he meets black men on certain streets. Similarly, a decade later, the essayist and novelist Edward Hoagland extols a New York where once “Negro bitterness bore down mainly on other Negroes.” Where some see mere panhandlers, Hoagland sees “a mugger who is clearly screwing up his nerve to do more than just ask for money.” But Hoagland has “the New Yorker’s quick-hunch posture for broken-field maneuvering,” and the bad guy swerves away.

I often witness that “hunch posture,” from women after dark on the warrenlike streets of Brooklyn where I live. They seem to set their faces on neutral and, with their purse straps strung across their chests bandolier style, they forge ahead as though bracing themselves against being tackled. I understand, of course, that the danger they perceive is not a hallucination. Women are particularly vulnerable to street violence, and young black males are drastically over-represented among the perpetrators of that violence. Yet these truths are no solace against the kind of alienation that comes of being ever the suspect, against being set apart, a fearsome entity with whom pedestrians avoid making eye contact.

It is not altogether clear to me how I reached the ripe old age of 22 without being conscious of the lethality nighttime pedestrians attributed to me. Perhaps it was because in Chester, Pennsylvania, the small, angry industrial town where I came of age in the 1960s, I was scarcely noticeable against a backdrop of gang warfare, street knifing, and murders. I grew up one of the good boys, had perhaps a half-dozen fist fights. In retrospect, my shyness of combat has clear sources.

Many things go into the making of a young thug. One of those things is the consummation of the male romance with the power to intimidate. An infant discovers that random flailings send the baby bottle flying out of the crib and crashing to the floor. Delighted, the joyful babe repeats those motions again and again, seeking to duplicate the feat. Just so, I recall the points at which some of my boyhood friends were finally seduced by the perception of themselves as tough guys. When a mark cowered and surrendered his money without resistance, myth and reality merged—and paid off. It is, after all, only manly to embrace the power to frighten and intimidate. We, as men, are not supposed to give an inch of our lane on the highway; we are to seize the fighter’s edge in work and in play and even in love; we are to be valiant in the face of hostile forces.

Unfortunately, poor and powerless young men seem to take all this nonsense literally. As a boy, I saw countless tough guys locked away; I have since buried several. They were babies, really—a teenage cousin, a brother of 22, a childhood friend in his mid-twenties—all gone down in episodes of bravado played out in the streets. I came to doubt the virtues of intimidation early on. I chose, perhaps even unconsciously, to remain a shadow—timid, but a survivor.

The fearsomeness mistakenly attributed to me in public places often has a perilous flavor. The most frightening of these confusions occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s when I worked as a journalist in Chicago. One day, rushing into the office of a magazine I was writing for, with a deadline story in hand, I was mistaken for a burglar. The office manager called security and, with an ad hoc posse, pursued me through the labyrinthine halls, nearly to my editor’s door. I had no way of proving who I was. I could only move briskly toward the company of someone who knew me.

Another time I was on assignment for a local paper and killing time before an interview. I entered a jewelry store on the city's affluent Near North Side. The proprietor excused herself and returned with an enormous red Doberman pinscher straining at the end of a leash. She stood, the dog extended toward me, silent to my questions, her eyes bulging nearly out of her head. I took a cursory look around, nodded, and bade her good night. Relatively speaking, however, I never fared as badly as another black male journalist. He went to nearby Waukegan, Illinois, a couple of summers ago to work on a story about a murderer who was born there. Mistaking the reporter for the killer, police hauled him from his car at gunpoint and but for his press credentials would probably have tried to book him. Such episodes are not uncommon. Black men trade tales like this all the time.

In "My Negro Problem – And Ours," Podhoretz writes that the hatred he feels for blacks makes itself known to him through a variety of avenues – one being his discomfort with that "special brand of paranoid touchiness" to which he says blacks are prone. No doubt he is speaking here of black men. In time, I learned to smother the rage I felt at so often being taken for a criminal. Not to do so would surely have led to madness – via that special "paranoid touchiness" that so annoyed Podhoretz at the time he wrote the essay.

I began to take precautions to make myself less threatening. I move about with care, particularly late in the evening. I give a wide berth to nervous people on subway platforms during the wee hours, particularly when I have exchanged business clothes for jeans. If I happen to be entering a building behind some people who appear skittish, I may walk by, letting them clear the lobby before I return, so as not to seem to be following them. I have been calm and extremely congenial on those rare occasions when I've been pulled over by the police.

And on late-evening constitutionals along streets less traveled by, I employ what has proved to be an excellent tension-reducing measure: I whistle melodies from Beethoven and Vivaldi and the more popular classical composers. Even steely New Yorkers hunching toward nighttime destinations seem to relax, and occasionally they even join in the tune. Virtually everybody seems to sense that a mugger wouldn't be warbling bright, sunny selections from Vivaldi's Four Seasons. It is my equivalent of the cowbell that hikers wear when they know they are in bear country.

READING STRATEGIES

The reading strategies you employ should vary according to your goals for reading: to understand, to respond critically, or to understand writing techniques. These goals can overlap, of course, but whenever you try to do too many things as you read, your effectiveness at each task suffers. For this reason, you may often need to read a selection more than once, concentrating on a different goal each time. The strategies on the following pages should help enrich your reading experience.

Reading for Understanding

When you read for understanding, you focus on ideas and information. You try to identify the main idea (thesis) and the line of reasoning that supports it. You explore meanings and values. Keep these questions in mind as you read for understanding.

- What is this selection about?
- What does this selection mean?
- What is this selection's purpose?
- How is the main idea developed or supported?

What is this selection about? Some essays focus on one topic throughout. Other essays, just as effective, discuss several related topics, such as the effect of television on attitudes towards violence and its consequences for family life. Brent Staples's essay, "Just Walk on By," presents a variety of examples and brief incidents, but they all illustrate how people reacted to the author's presence.

As a reader, you need to be able to identify the topic or related topics around which an essay is constructed. Avoid the temptation to pay attention only to ideas and information that interest you. You risk misunderstanding the real focus of the essay if you give selective attention to the elements that interest you.

Strategy: Look for cues. Writers frequently use a title, headings in the text, or direct statements as cues identifying an essay's topic or focus.

Title: "Women, Men, and the Media"

Heading: "Stereotypical Portrayals of Men and Women"

Direct Statements: "But in what ways are our behaviors, especially those of children, shaped by the inaccurate and oversimplified portraits of men and women that populate the mass media?"

Strategy: Make a list of topics. Review what you have read and make a list of the topics or important ideas discussed in the essay. If the elements in your list fit clearly within a broader topic, state it; or if they do not, try stating their relationship in a way that identifies the essay's focus.

local restaurants replaced by fast food
small shops replaced by malls
family farms turn into agribusinesses
hardware stores replaced by home building centers
small towns replaced by sprawling suburbs

Overall Topic: change from small, individualized social organizations to large, more impersonal ones

Strategy: Look for repetition. Identify words, ideas, or subjects that appear repeatedly in the text. Such repetitions provide evidence of an essay's focus and may even be intentional signals provided by the writer. In "Just Walk on By," for example, Brent Staples uses words like "softy," "embarrassed," and "frightening" to refer to himself, his feelings, and his reaction to the incidents he describes. He uses a contrasting set of words like "fearsomeness," "dangerous," and "terror" to describe people's (mistaken) reactions to him and to other young black men like him.

What does this selection mean? Expository writing offers conclusions and insights. Argumentative writing offers opinions or proposes a course of action. Much of the value of these kinds of writing lies in the insights, ideas, and opinions conveyed: What the writing means.

Sometimes direct statements announce the meaning(s) of an essay, as when Brent Staples in "Just Walk on By" says that "the fearsomeness mistakenly attributed to me in public places often has a perilous flavor." Often, however, conclusions are presented less directly or even implied, requiring you to provide an answer to the question, "What does it mean?" Good writing generally offers more than one insight or conclusion, typically a main point and several related points. Identifying the main point is an important step for any reader trying to understand an essay.

Misunderstanding is always possible, however. Some of an essay's conclusions may be relatively difficult to understand. Some may be implied rather than stated directly. Some may seem very important to you because you find them particularly interesting, even though their role in the essay may not be that significant.

STRATEGY: HIGHLIGHT DIRECT STATEMENTS. WHILE YOU READ OR WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED READING AN ESSAY, TRY HIGHLIGHTING, UNDERLINING, OR OTHERWISE MAKING NOTE OF CONCLUSIONS, GENERALIZATIONS, OR OPINIONS STATED DIRECTLY TO READERS. THESE CAN INCLUDE STATEMENTS (OR RESTATEMENTS) OF AN ESSAY'S MAIN IDEA OR THESIS LIKE THE FOLLOWING.

"Taboos, big or small, are always about having to respect somebody's (often irrational) boundary – or else."

– Michael Ventura
"Don't Even Think About It!"

"I am a peace-loving woman. But several events in the past 10 years have convinced me I'm safer when I carry a pistol."

– Linda Hasselstrom
"A Peaceful Woman Explains Why She Carries a Pistol"

They can also include headings in the text, topic sentences in paragraphs, or other statements that receive special emphasis.

For many essays, a list of such statements would provide a rough but revealing outline of the writer's exploration of a subject or of the chain of argument supporting a thesis. Here is the list Shauna Benoit compiled from her reading of Cullen Murphy's essay, "Hello, Darkness" (pp. 327-332). Note how the list clarifies the way the writer has arranged the essay.

"The average American a hundred years ago was able to sleep 20 percent longer than the average American today."

"Other evidence seems to indicate that the rate of sleep loss is in fact accelerating."

"We are laboring under a large and increasingly burdensome 'sleep deficit'...."

"Many commentators would blame it on what might be called the AWOL factor—that is, the American Way of Life. We are by nature a busy and ambitious people whom tectonic social forces...have turned into a race of laboratory rats on a treadmill going nowhere ever faster."

"Yet electricity's ubiquitous and seemingly most innocuous use—to power the common light bulb—could not help exacting a price in sleep."

"Whatever it is that we wish or are made to do—pursue leisure, earn a living—there are simply far more usable hours now in which to do it."

Strategy: Look for repetition and emphasis. Look for words, phrases, details, and ideas that the writer repeats throughout a text. They are cues to ideas or issues that receive special emphasis within the text— even if not all the repetition was consciously intended by the writer. Repetitions can help you interpret the meanings and values around which an essay has been constructed and can also act as evidence for your conclusions about the essay.

Strategy: Pause and summarize. As you read an essay you will likely pause at a number of "resting places," between sections or paragraphs, for example. When you pause, take a moment to summarize what the essay has already said and to predict what it will say next. Glance back over the essay for evidence to support your interpretation, then read ahead to test the accuracy of your predictions as well as your understanding of the essay's meanings and values.

What is this selection's purpose? Expository and argumentative writing each have general purposes: expository—to explain and explore; and argumentative—to convince and persuade. To understand an individual essay, you need to recognize its more specific purpose(s), however.

By taking purpose into account as you read, you can more easily grasp an essay's meaning and evaluate its likely effect on readers. Sometimes, writers state their purpose directly; at other times, you will need to pay attention to repeated phrases and ideas in a text to understand its purpose. Remember, too, that essays often have secondary purposes as well as primary ones.

How is the main idea developed or supported? Once you have identified the main idea (thesis) and related ideas in an essay, you can pay attention to the distinction between them and the examples, information, and discussions that develop or support them. To do so, try keeping two questions in mind as you read: How is the main idea developed or supported? How adequate is the development/ support?

Writers will often make your job easier by using familiar words or phrases to signal supporting details, discussions, or examples. Here are a few of the most familiar.

for example	supports	in the case of
for instance	explains	sheds light on
contributes to	because	illustrates
justifies	as a consequence	explains

In “Just Walk on By,” for example, Brent Staples uses phrases like “in my first year,” “that was more than a decade ago,” “I often witness,” and “another time” to emphasize that the examples he presents show an enduring pattern of mistaken reactions to him – simply because of his age and race.

Reading Critically

Critical reading questions and challenges a text. It treats the text as a starting point, not the final word on a subject or issue. Critical reading helps you develop your own ideas and conclusions. It helps you evaluate the ideas and information in a text. Critical reading suggests ways to draw on reading for your own writing. Developing a habit of critical reading is an important part of developing your ability as a writer.

Above all, critical reading is active reading. It calls for activity on your part—jotting down ideas and responses, evaluating conclusions and information, speculating about consequences, or making notes for an essay of your own. At times, of course, you may wish to read simply to gather ideas and information. But even when you do, critical reading habits can come to your aid by prompting you to consider just how reliable a text’s information and ideas are.

Strategy: Keeping a reading journal. A reading journal is a notebook, folder, or computer file in which you keep your responses to reading: notes, questions, ideas, criticisms, and the like. Turning the fleeting ideas, questions, and responses that occur to you as you read into sentences in a journal helps you remember them. It gives you a chance to consider them at greater length and makes them available for later use, perhaps in an essay of your own.

You can organize entries in a reading journal according to the particular selection, allotting a few pages to each article, chapter, or book, for example. Or you can organize the journal by categories, such as “Responses (and Objections) to Readings About New Roles for Men and Women” or “Quotations and Information for Use in My ‘Dangers of Dieting’ Paper.”

Are you looking for topics and issues to address in your own writing? Make notes about interesting or controversial topics you encounter in reading, particularly those about which you have strong feelings or a distinct point of view or those that the author treats superficially, leaving you an opportunity to provide a detailed treatment of your own. Are you looking for conclusions or perspectives that differ from yours? Summarize or quote any that you encounter and explore them in writing along with your own point of view so you can discover ways to incorporate both in an essay of your own.

Strategy: Create marginal notes. Marginal notes are the scribbles, jottings, abbreviations, and other annotations you make in the margins of a book or magazine. Typically, you make such annotations when something you read prompts a strong response that you can record in brief form. You may wish to use marginal notes to record agreements or disagreements with what the writer says, to highlight passages or techniques you admire, or to note important ideas and information.

Your marginal notes are most likely to be of use to you when they indicate ways to turn the text or your response to it into material for your own writing, as with the following.

No! Putting attractive people in an ad is not necessarily a way of using sex to sell.

People can be attractive without being sexy, for example.

And the people belong in the ad because they show how the product works. (They wear safety goggles, for example.)

Would it be better to have ugly people? Or just plain-looking people? I bet audiences would be critical of that approach, too.

To make your marginal annotations as useful as possible, try to give some variety to your responses. Consider making comments in categories like these.

- Interpretations of what the author is trying to say
- Questions you wish the author had answered
- Objections to the author's conclusions
- Counterarguments the writer fails to mention
- Notes on passages you find confusing
- Evaluations of the writer's conclusions or techniques of expression.

Strategy: Identify opportunities for writing. By responding to your reading with questions like the following, you can identify opportunities for your own writing.

1. What topics or issues does the writer address satisfactorily and completely? What questions are left unanswered, problems left unsolved, or issues left unresolved?
2. Does the writer present a balanced perspective in offering conclusions or are important explanations and points of view left unconsidered?
3. Does the writer reason fairly and provide adequate support for conclusions? Or is the writing clearly biased, omitting evidence or misrepresenting facts and distorting others' positions?
4. Are there other kinds of information and experiences or different ideas and approaches that might lead to conclusions differing from those offered by the writer?

Strategy: Evaluate a source's reliability and usefulness. Evaluating the trustworthiness of a source and identifying its strengths and limitations are important parts of critical reading. To read critically and evaluate a source, ask questions like these.

1. What conclusions or generalizations does the source offer? Are they supported adequately or do they go beyond the facts presented in the text? Are they consistent with my knowledge of the topic?
2. What is the reputation of the author, the publisher, or the publication in which the text appeared? Is the reputation one of thoroughness and balance or of bias and carelessness? How does this piece of writing compare with others on the topic?
3. Are there any obvious errors? Which parts of the discussion are detailed and well documented?
4. Does the text acknowledge and document its own sources? Does it appear to treat others' opinions fairly, presenting them in clear summaries or through quotations?

STRATEGY: EVALUATE ELECTRONIC SOURCES WITH SPECIAL CARE. ELECTRONIC SOURCES SUCH AS WEB PAGES AND DISCUSSION GROUPS POSE SOME SPECIAL PROBLEMS—AND OPPORTUNITIES. THESE SITES CAN BE RICH AND PROVOCATIVE SOURCES OF IDEAS AND DETAILS. AT THE SAME TIME, ELECTRONIC SITES ARE OFTEN PRODUCED BY INDIVIDUALS OR ORGANIZATIONS WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS OR BIAS ARE DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE—UNLIKE THOSE FOR SOURCES IN SCHOLARLY JOURNALS, WELL-KNOWN MAGAZINES, OR BOOKS FROM REPUTABLE PUBLISHERS. USE QUESTIONS LIKE THESE TO EVALUATE ELECTRONIC SOURCES.

1. Who is responsible for the site? Are there any obvious signs of bias or distortion, such as highly selective information or exaggerated language and points of view? In what ways does the site serve the interests of the person or organization that produced it, and how might this affect its reliability?
2. Are sources for information indicated clearly, or are details, examples, and ideas presented without attribution or documentation? Is information presented clearly and carefully? Are ideas and opinions explained thoroughly? Are alternate points of view acknowledged and discussed?

Reading for Technique

Reading for technique helps you identify and understand writing strategies you can adapt for your own work. Patterns of organization, ways to explore ideas, strategies for presenting supporting details, and ways to use words and sentences—reading for technique brings all of these to your attention.

The questions on “Expository (or Argumentative) Techniques” and “Diction and Vocabulary” following each selection in this book focus on technique. They help you develop your ability to analyze the techniques writers employ. They also suggest ways various techniques help writers achieve a range of purposes.

Strategy: Pay attention to expository (and argumentative) patterns. Writers use expository and argumentative patterns in varied ways: alone or in combination, for whole essays or sections of essays. The introductions to Chapters 3–13 in this book discuss patterns and their uses. The following questions can also help you identify patterns and the roles they play.

Questions

Pattern

Does the essay use examples and illustrations to illustrate a generality? Does the writer use examples to help readers understand the topic and his or her conclusions? Does the essay use examples to illustrate and support a thesis?

Example (Chapter 3)

Does the essay present ideas or information in categories? Are the categories arranged to explain or support the writer’s conclusions?

Classification (Chapter 4)

Does the essay discuss differences or similarities among concepts, activities, outlooks, situations, or subjects? Are contrasts or similarities used to make a point or support a thesis?

Comparison and Contrast
(Chapter 5)

DOES THE ESSAY HIGHLIGHT SURPRISING ANALOGY (CHAPTER 6)

similarities between one subject and another, seemingly very different subjects? Does it use the similarities to illustrate or explain issues, processes, objects, or concepts?

Does the essay explain how something works or how it can be done? Does it use the explanation to support conclusions or a thesis?

Process Analysis
(Chapter 7)

Does the essay tell why something happened and what is likely to happen in the future? Is the discussion of causes and effects organized to explain or to support the author’s opinion?

Cause and Effect
(Chapter 8)

Does the writer offer an extended definition or a number of definitions? Are they arranged to support or lead up to the writer’s conclusions? Does the writer use definitions to present

Definition (Chapter 9)

an issue and develop reasons for agreeing with his or her opinion?

Does the essay discuss the features (physical, emotional, etc.) of the subject? Is this discussion arranged to

Description (Chapter 10)

SUPPORT THE ESSAY'S CONCLUSIONS OR TO develop support for the writer's stand on an issue?

Does the essay explain what happened? To whom? When? Where? Is the story arranged to make a point

Narration (Chapter 11)

or provide an explanation? To support an opinion?

Does the writer reason from facts or events to arrive at a generalization or move from a generalization to interpret facts and events? Induction and Deduction (Chapter 12)

Does the writer offer an opinion (an argumentative thesis or proposition)? Does the writer provide evidence to support the opinion and persuade readers to agree with it? Argument (Chapter 13)

Strategy: Turn to “A Guide to Terms.” “A Guide to Terms” at the end of this book (pp. 657–676) contains entries for important writing techniques, from subjects such as essay introductions and closings to creating emphasis and using the correct choice of words (“Diction”) or sentence structure (“Syntax”). Before reading a selection in this book or elsewhere, turn to the Guide, choose an entry that interests you, and then read with attention to the technique described in the entry.

REVIEWING

The questions you ask while reading, your pauses to summarize and understand, your marginal notes and journal entries, your evaluations and responses—all these should come to mind when you have finished reading an essay and begin to review it. You may find the following framework helpful for review: Meanings and Values, Expository (or Argumentative) Techniques, Diction and Vocabulary, and Reading to Write. Questions and activities to lead you through these areas of review follow the selections in the text.

When you focus on meanings and values, you look back at the different topics covered in a text and the writer’s conclusions about them. You ask if the topics are linked by a focus on a primary concern and if the various conclusions or interpretations are unified by a single perspective or thesis. You also consider the values and value judgments advanced in the essay.

When you focus on expository or argumentative techniques, you pay attention to overall patterns of organization and development (see pp. 16–18), to opening and closing strategies, to paragraph and sentence techniques, to the use of detail and kinds of support—in short, to the many different strategies a writer employs, except for those dealing primarily with words and groups of words.

In focusing on diction and vocabulary, you look at the words an author has chosen, the patterns of word choice (or diction), the way the diction supports the writer’s purposes, and any words you need to look up in order to understand the text.

Finally, when you focus on reading to write, you look at the ways you can use the essay as a springboard for collaborating with other writers, for considering possible audiences, and for developing an essay of your own.

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The Reading Process #

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Reading Strategies #

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