Approaches to Reading 1[1]

Understanding complicated texts requires careful, systematic reading. Spend this week thinking about *how* you read, and consider the information below.

Before you start—

Get the right level of comfort: read on your bed, at a desk, on a sofa.

Get the right level of noise: read in complete silence or with some background noise.

Get enough light: read by sunlight, lounge lights, room lights.

Get the right environment: read alone, read with others.

First read—

Underline or highlight passages you feel are important.

Put question marks next to passages you don't understand so you can find them quickly later or in class.

Bracket words you don't know and **find them in a dictionary**.

Losing concentration?

Take a short break, and then come back to the essay.

Read again and again until you regain your concentration.

Try summarizing what the author has argued so far.

And then—

Spend some time summarizing what you have just read.

Get together with students from our class to work through complicated passages.

Get together with students from our class to review the main ideas of the essay.

[1] Created by Dr. Erin Kelly for the Rutgers Writing Program

Now read again—

> When you plan to write about a text, reading it once simply isn't sufficient. Read a text twice before coming to class so you can best participate in conversation, and read it again (possibly again and again) before writing about it.
>
> Look up any words you still don't understand in a dictionary.
>
> Write questions you have about a text down and bring your list to class.

Understanding and Analysis

Try some of these strategies to help you understand a text.

- Look for repetition of words, ideas, or phrases. They might be important to the argument as a whole.
- Look for words in **bold**, *italics*, or "quotations marks."
- Look for passages you don't understand. You may not understand them because the author is trying to express a difficult, complex, or important idea.
- Pay attention to any questions the author asks. They may be pointing you towards the argument.
- Look for the ways in which the title of the essay relates to the content.
- Pay close attention to any examples that the author gives. Try to figure out how they prove her or his argument.
- Try to state the argument in your own words periodically as you read.
- Pay close attention to the opening and closing of the essay.
- Look for places where the author summarizes his or her argument.
- Pay attention to passages you react to. If a passage provokes a response, that may mean you are about to do some critical thinking—you should consider why or in what way a passage has moved you.