Reading Strategies for Graduate Students

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Today we will be discussing...

- how genre analysis can help us read strategically
- how reading in layers can help us prioritize what to read and when
- how pre, during, and post-reading strategies can help us manage our readings
Each genre and type of writing has its unique conventions.

Learn the rhetorical conventions of texts and the macrostructure of texts in your field so you can strategically read them.

In other words, we can learn and predict where key information will be in a text.
Classify Texts In Your Field

Adapted from Cory Nelson (2019), “How to Read Like a Graduate Student” workshop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Primary Sources:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Theory:</strong></th>
<th><strong>How-to Documents:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Historical Surveys:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Original Scholarship:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>qualitative and quantitative data, literary works, artifacts, letters, policy documents, testimonies</td>
<td>provides a philosophical or methodological approach to analyzing an issue, event, object, or idea</td>
<td>instruct how to use or apply a theory or method or certain type of practice</td>
<td>provide context for topics</td>
<td>criticism, empirical studies, problem-solution articles, disciplinary overviews</td>
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Genres of Writing = Specific Purposes

**Primary Sources** = read these if you want to find evidence that can ground or support your argument or finding.

**Theory** = read this to help explain how you're thinking about a concept; theoretical texts might be heavy on examples, typologies, processes.

**How-to documents** = reading these should help you learn how something is done or how something works.

**Historical surveys** = read these to know from where a topic emerges.

**Original scholarship** = read these to learn what new ideas are proposed; how scholars are advancing or re-mixing ideas; contributes something new.
READING IN LAYERS
Layer 1: Skimming and Scanning

**Skim:** Title, Subheadings, Graphics, Figures

**Scan:** Abstract, Introduction, Conclusion
First sentence of each body paragraph
Layer 2: Meso-level reading

Reading for **structure** and **main ideas** to analyze rhetorical structure and thesis

Reading for **main support** to evaluate strength of argument and evidence

Reading for **main significance and relevance** to understand how the text matters at the time of writing and today.
Layer 3: In-Depth reading

Reading to analyze the **nuance in the** writer’s argument

Reading to **respond to** the writer’s argument

Reading to understand more fully the writer’s evidence
When do I...

- Read for **quick skim (LAYER 1)**?
  - When entering a new field and when the topic is a bit unfamiliar but you want to be able to talk about it.

- Read for **meso-level engagement (LAYER 2)**?
  - When the topic needs more in-depth investigation for a paper you are planning to write, a class discussion you are leading, or a short synthesis you are writing.

- Read fully **in depth (LAYER 3)**?
  - When using the text for support in an argument you’re making; when the text provides important discussion, context, or insight to a project or task you are doing.
  - When the subject is closely related to your research
  - When you find yourself commenting and annotating a lot.
When do I...

Layer 1 and Layer 2 will almost always go together in grad school
QUESTIONS?
Before Reading
Set the Agenda
Before Reading: 4 Steps

1. **Activate Schemata.** Chances are you know *something* about this topic already. Reflect on what you already know about the subject.

2. **Preview.** Get a broad sense of the topic and how difficult the material might be (skim the text!).

3. **Predict.** Based on your preview and schemata, predict what the author might be telling you.

4. **Question.** Come up with some questions based on the title, subheadings, and subtitles *that the reading will most likely answer.*
Why are you reading?

Knowing your purpose for reading can help you determine how long or how deeply you have to read.
Types of Reading purposes

Critical Reading Handout

- **To identify:** find basic info; scan and skim for specific detail
- **To analyze:** to break down into smaller parts
- **To compare:** to note similarities and differences to another text
- **To evaluate:** to assess the quality of argument, strength of evidence
- **To respond:** to engage with the ideas, interpret them, present a position or opinion about the text
Pre-Reading Practice: Worksheet

- Activate Schemata: What do I already know about this topic?
- Preview: Highlight the headers and skim the organization of the article
- Predict: What could this article be about?
- Question: What questions do you think the authors are asking? What questions in the field do you think this article asks?

When reading

Read Strategically
First Read: The AIC Method

From Raul Pacheco-Vega, PhD @raulpacheco

- **01** Use for rapid skimming to get an idea of core concepts covered by the text (LAYER 1).
- **02** Abstract (if available)
- **03** Introduction (chapter, section, paragraph)
- **04** Conclusion (chapter, section, paragraph)
- **05** First sentence of body paragraphs (or first paragraph of a chapter).
While Reading AIC

Key words to pay attention to and what they mean for your text:
- Vocabulary terms: look up definitions of words you don’t know if they are in the title, introduction, topic sentences of paragraphs, and conclusion.
- Directional words/prepositions and conjunctions: they determine relationships between key ideas.

Know basic sentence structure and signal phrasing and what they mean:
- Definition sentence: WORD + is a + CATEGORY + that/which
- Explanation sentence:
  - This means that ...
  - In other words, ...
What’s the thesis or research question?

What’s the gap or niche in the current field that the study is filling or addressing?

What’s the significance of the present research?
Conclusion

What are the main findings?
How do the main findings solve the research problem?
What is the implication or relevance of the findings?
Reading in further depth
(if you have time and/or if necessary)
Reading in further depth (if you have time and/or if necessary)

After reading for AIC, you can read the body paragraphs in further depth now that you have a better idea of the text’s topic, argument, purpose, etc.

Use AXES for paragraphs: Assertion, eXample, Explanation, Significance
Reading Paragraphs through AXES

A
Assertion. Topic sentence or main claim of the paragraph

X
Examples. Evidentiary material, supporting details, definitions, descriptions, illustrations.

E
Explanation. Discussion of examples. Cue words: “In other words...” “This means that ...” and words that refer back to the evidence.

S
Significance. Relevance of the assertion and examples to the main claim or thesis of the text.
In addition to highlighting platform jumping practices in Zambia, our informants foregrounded different motivations for and gradients of anonymity in online environments. Anonymity is critical to online identity construction, and social media provide different possibilities for maintaining anonymity (Van der Nagel & Frith, 2015). Alice Marwick and danah boyd have noted that while in offline situations people know the context within which they are conversing, in social media sites there is often a “context collapse” in the sense that users are unsure who exactly is viewing their performance of self and are unable to restrict this performance to a particular audience segment (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Anonymity provides a way to negotiate this context collapse. The desire for anonymity depends on the user’s perception of a particular news site, blog, or social media platform and the kinds of people and social groups the user thinks will frequent the platform. As users gauge varied online contexts, they enact anonymity in the process of making their views public, and they may either critique or endorse the status quo.
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Check for Understanding

- How would I summarize this argument/main point to a friend who has not read the text?
- What is the main point of the author and article in this text?
- What is the main support?
- What is the theme or problem of the text?
- How can I apply this information to course material and discussions?
- How can I apply this to other areas (other courses, research you’re doing or you’re familiar with)?
### Review and Record

| Keep track of your notes and thoughts/responses to your readings. | Google Doc, Evernote, Mendeley (notes function), Excel Sheet, MS Word—you have plenty of options to capturing your research and readings! |
| Find a system that works for you. | Some examples [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). |
After Reading
Review, Reflect, and Evaluate
After Reading: 5 Steps

- **Summarize.** Try to summarize the main idea and main support/details of what you just read.

- **Reflect.** Reflect on what you have learned and try to make connections to class discussion, your own life or experience, or real-world examples.

- **Review.** Review your notes and see if your questions have been answered.

- **Evaluate.** Evaluate the merits and weaknesses of what you’ve just read. Think about the rhetorical features of the text (*how* the author proves their point) and whether you find it convincing.

- **Ask:** *Why is my professor having me read this?*
Some General Tips

- **Dedicate time to pre-reading.** A 10-minute pre-reading session can significantly improve your retention.

- **Monitor your comprehension.** If you find yourself getting distracted or reading mindlessly, consider taking a break, regroup and pick it up again from where you last remember paying attention.

- **Take breaks.** Especially for longer texts, break up your reading into smaller, more manageable time blocks (20 minutes) or sections (by subheadings or some other method).

- **Be patient.** Don’t expect to get everything the first time you read it. Remember that your first read is always going to be harder, slower, and more taxing than your subsequent reads. Comprehension improves when you focus on certain tasks or purpose one at a time.

- **Be flexible.** Correct your strategy if you find that you are having a hard time concentrating or comprehending. Find resources to help you understand, picture, and connect the reading.

- **Don’t worry (too much) about retention.** If you end up specializing in a particular field, you will re-read these works.
Resources


Nelson, C. (2019, October 07). How to Read Like A Graduate Student. USC Writing Center Workshop. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PFMyamxSzf2_s3jj9q8XaNzYQgI93V8_/view


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