

READING ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

(used throughout DOC 1)

“To become a thoughtful, effective writer, you must become a critical reader. Reading critically means not just comprehending passively and remembering what you read but also scrutinizing actively and making thoughtful judgments about your reading. When you read a text critically, you need to alternate between understanding and questioning – on the one hand, striving to understand the text on its own terms; on the other hand, taking care to question its ideas and authority. You will benefit greatly from reading what others have written – and reading your own writing – in this way.”

Rise Axelrod & Charles Cooper, *Concise Guide to Writing*, Fourth Edition, 2006.

This handout presents three basic steps to help you understand texts and engage in a conversation with them: 1) reading and annotation, 2) summarization, and 3) analysis.

I. **Read** each assigned article carefully and **annotate** the features of its argument.

A. Begin by **previewing** the article quickly, trying to get a general idea of the writer’s overall subject and primary claim.

B. Then **analyze** the reading slowly; **underline** important sections and write notes in the margin which ask questions, identify **key words** and ideas, reveal key points and organization; reflect on the significance of facts and concepts. In other words, read actively while you read; *have a dialogue with the text*.

As you make notes on the reading, answer the following set of questions:

1. What question, topic, or problem is the text dealing with? Does the title signal the topic?
2. What information does the introduction provide?
3. What is the writer’s main point, *claim*, or thesis? Underline, star, or highlight it somehow.
4. Writers of complex arguments often include a forecast of how they will develop their thesis and argument. The forecast outlines the article’s key supporting points and offers a map of how they will be developed. Underline and label the forecast statement when one is included.
5. Circle the key terms the writer uses throughout the argument to connect the main points in the argument.
6. Underline the main ideas in the sequence they appear. (They often appear in topic sentences.)
7. Note the logical “reasons” that tell the reader why they should accept the writer’s thesis.
8. Label the evidence (examples, statistics, authorities, anecdotes, scenarios, **textual proof**) the writer uses to *support* the reasons and thesis. Is the evidence appropriate, believable, and *convincing*? What kinds of sources are cited? Are they from books, newspapers, periodicals, or the Web? Are they completely documented?

9. Are possible key objections to the writer's ideas discussed? (Most successful arguments include such **counterarguments**.) If so, identify them. Are the opposing or alternative arguments acknowledged, accommodated, or **refuted**?

10. Does the conclusion, as Raimes suggests, "frame the essay" and "end on a strong note"? What concluding "option" is used in the argument? (See Raimes, chapter 7d.)

- II. After annotating the text, and thinking about the article's main claim and supporting reasons and evidence, write a brief 3-4 sentence **summary** of the author's argument **in your own words**.

Begin your written summary by introducing the writer or writers, including full names, and re-state the writer's main claim in your own words.

You may wish to follow the useful acronym, "CURE ME," to write a good summary. The "cure" tells HOW to write your summary; the "me" tells WHAT to include in it.

C ondensed	<i>Use only necessary words and phrases. Only say an idea once--don't repeat!</i>
U nbiased	<i>Leave out "I" and your analysis and personal opinions.</i>
RE stated	<i>Put the author's ideas into your own words. Name and refer clearly to the person making the argument (e.g. "Hall argues...", "Kennedy claims...", " etc).</i>

M ain Idea	<i>Start with the author's name and the reading's title, followed by a verb like "claims," "argues," "contends," and the central point of the reading.</i>
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E ssential Points	<i>Include the author's major support (reasons, subclaims) and exclude the minor support (evidence, examples). Include any key terms. Omit long, direct quotes.</i>
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At the end of the summary, put the page numbers of the ideas or article being summarized. If you need to include a brief, relevant quote or key terms, put them in quotation marks (Raimes, 40g.)

- III. After completing a brief summary of the writer's argument, write an analysis of one or two specific claims or examples included in the article.

Ask yourself questions:

- Specifically, in what ways do you find the author's argument convincing? What parts of the argument do you find limited or unconvincing? Why?
- Does the text challenge, oppose, or help explain in a new way your understanding of the topic?
- Is the reasoning consistent, believable, and complete?

Choose only one or two passages as the focus of your evaluation to avoid an over-generalized analysis. An analysis of specific passages will be much more convincing to a reader.

- IV. For a longer paper, include a Works Cited page of all articles and sources that are summarized, paraphrased, or quoted in your paper. In DOC courses, we require that you use the MLA citation format. Rules and examples of MLA List of Works Cited can be found in Raimes, Part 7.