

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 some basic steps to help you read and analyze the logic of arguments created by writers.

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. Does the introduction “provide context and background information to set up a thesis”? (Raimes chapter 2e). What information does it 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*?

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 2e.)

- II. After using the above steps and annotating the text, write a brief 3-4 sentence summary. You might begin by making a scratch outline of the article's main ideas. Once you understand those key points, write a summary in your own words. Begin your written summary by introducing the writer and re-stating the writer's main claim. Follow that with a brief explanation of the author's key supporting points and reasons. 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, 9f).

Remember, in your introduction, name and refer clearly to the person making the argument (e.g. "Hall argues..." or "Kennedy claims..." etc.) so that you clearly note the source of the material. Include the page number(s) of the summarized material at the end of the summary (Raimes 9f and 9i)

- III. After completing a brief summary of the writer's argument, write a response to one or two specific claims or examples included in the article. Ask yourself questions: In what ways do you find the author's argument convincing? What parts of the argument do you find limited or unconvincing? Does the text challenge, oppose, or help explain in a new way your experience or understanding of the topic? Examine the logical reasoning. Is the reasoning consistent, believable, and complete? Choose only one or two passages as the focus of your evaluation to avoid an over generalized response. A response to specific passages will be much more convincing to a reader.
- IV. For a paper, include a Works Cited page of all articles and sources that are summarized, paraphrase, 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, chapters 11 and 12.