

Active-Reading Guide

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This course requires *active* reading: we do not want you reading passively, but to unpack, contextualize, and analyze arguments—and reflect on your relationship to them. We want you to be critical and introspective when you read. Some of the writing may need to be read more like a good math text than a popular novel. If you never learned to read that way, or have gotten out of the habit, you should learn or re-learn how to read with full attention and engagement.

We urge you to print out your readings. Do this at a reasonable size. You may want to purchase a printer and a ream of paper if you don't have convenient access to a printer. Cell phones and other distractions should not be on near your person when you are reading. This is hard for many students, and more significant than they realize. Read with a highlighter and a pencil or pen in hand, taking notes and making comments on the printout.

In our experience, many students distractedly read a text shortly before class, half understand it, can't answer objective questions about it on a quiz, are unable to say anything non-obvious about it in class, and can't remember anything about it by the time we have our final exam. Half-reading is a waste of time, or maybe worse.

The following is a suggested template for your use. It is meant more to spark ideas than to function as a checklist. What works for you could differ. That said, we may permit marked-up printouts and these active-reading templates for quizzes.

While this guide is expressed in terms of readings, most of what we say is just as applicable to analyzing films and other media.

1. Central argument or thesis statement

- An author may summarize his/her central claim(s) in a 1-2 sentence thesis statement in the text. Sometimes it will follow a phrase like: "In this paper, I argue..." After you've identified the central claim(s), try and put it into your own words.
- Who is the author's audience and what does s/he want them to know or do?
- Implicitly or explicitly, what position is the author arguing *against*?
- The author probably spent years thinking about, researching, and writing this work. What do you think motivated him/her?

2. Supporting evidence

- What evidence, examples, or other theories does the author use to support his/her claims?
- Upon what works and disciplines does the author draw?
- What key concepts does the author use to frame his/her arguments? Sometimes these are familiar words or phrases that are redefined to help illuminate new issues or clarify existing ones for the reader.

3. Noteworthy quotes

- What sentence or short passage stands out to you? What about it helps you understand an issue in a new way?
- What would you envision quoting in a paper, presentation, or discussion?
- How would you characterize the author's writing style? What can you say about his/her use of rhetorical techniques?
- What new words did you learn?
- Though it may feel tedious, take the time to copy quotes by hand onto the template. As always, use quotation marks or offset text when you quote passages, and include page numbers.

4. Questions, criticisms, connections

- What questions do you have that remain unanswered after reading the text?
- Is there something obvious that you feel the author did not address?
- Are there things that you feel that the author got completely wrong?
- Are there unstated assumptions that you think don't hold up? Why?
- Is there something in the text that reminded you of something *else* we read or discussed? Or something you have seen elsewhere? If so, explain the connection and relevance.

Author: _____ Title: _____

<p><u>Central argument or thesis statement:</u></p>	<p><u>Supporting evidence:</u></p>
<p><u>Noteworthy quotes:</u></p>	<p><u>Questions, criticisms, and connections:</u></p>