

## ACTIVE READING STRATEGIES OR, READING FOR WRITING

Reading a text in preparation for an academic writing assignment is different from reading for pleasure, and not just because the content is more serious or scholarly. Writing about something forces you to think about it and understand it in a different way. The following strategies can be used individually or in combination with one another to help prepare you for writing about what you've read.

### **Pre-read**

Before you even turn to page one of your reading assignment, consult a chapter summary, abstract, class notes, or even an online review in order to give you a basic understanding of what the text is going to cover and how. Reviews NEVER substitute for the text itself. If you use any outside sources in your writing, be sure to acknowledge them.

### **Mark up the text**

Read with a pen or pencil in hand, and when something grabs your attention, make a note of it on the page right away. This will enable you to record your initial responses, ideas and questions about the text. Underline, circle, or bracket passages that seem important and note why in the page margins. Post-it notes may prove helpful for jotting down more extensive thoughts. Try even different colored post-its for different kinds of responses. Marking up the text in this way will help you locate important passages not only later when you are drafting your paper but also more immediately for class discussion. This recommendation is useful only if you are using a text that you own. If you are using a book from the library or other borrowed text, skip this recommendation.

### **Take reading notes**

Some students find it helpful to take more detailed notes during the reading process, either in writing or at the computer. This process involves a greater time investment up front, but the reward is a much more detailed record of your thoughts, ideas and questions while reading.

### **Five-minute reflective writing**

Even if you do not take detailed notes while reading, these five-minute reflective writing exercises undertaken as soon as you finish your reading can be an invaluable way of helping you summarize or synthesize what you've just read.

*Free-write:* write whatever comes into your mind, uninterrupted and unedited, for five minutes.

*Quick questions:* Think about what you found most interesting, important, confusing, unexpected, etc. and generate some questions about what you've just read. Then spend a few minutes going back through the text to help you find answers to your questions.

*Summary:* write a single paragraph (5-6 sentences) summarizing what you've just read.

*Outline:* make a rough outline of what you've just read.

*Quotation bank:* transcribe the passages you find most important and include page numbers for possible use in your paper.

### **Reread, reread, and reread again!**

No academic writing assignment will succeed upon a single reading of a given text. Your understanding of a text will change and evolve with each subsequent reading, and you will notice things you did not before.