

Close Reading and Reader Response

During this semester we will focus on numerous essays and works of nonfiction. This literature can be considered literary art because it invites analysis transcending simple literal interpretation. To derive the greatest benefit from the literature, you will have to be alert and focused while you read. You must read these texts closely; therefore, you will not want to put off your reading until the last minute. Many are short pieces, so you should read them more than once. Because AP English Language and Composition is a college-level course, you must annotate your texts and you should record your engagement with the literature in your log. Beginning at the bottom of this page, you will find specific strategies for annotating texts as well as the expectations for the log.

- Read the assigned chapters in *The Language of Composition* and *Analysis, Argument and Synthesis* for an introduction to rhetorical analysis and "The Rhetorical Situation" before tackling the essays.
- Pre-read the text; develop an understanding of the text's meaning. Write a short summary of the text in your log.
- After you reread and annotate, write your impressions in your log. Include your dislikes and likes, any questions that arise, points that you find difficult to understand and the reasons why, as well as any revelations or reflections.
- Look for patterns and repetitions (motifs), and recurring elements within the text including images, phrases, and situations. Ask yourself why the author may have used these repetitions. How do they affect you as the reader? Do you derive meaning from them?
- Identify any passages and rhetorical devices that strike you as highly significant and explain why. How does this use of language contribute to the overall meaning of the text? How does the language contribute to the development of a concept?
- Identify unusual syntax and specific diction that strike you as highly significant. What effect does the author achieve by arranging the sentence that way? Why does he/she choose that specific word? Note unfamiliar vocabulary in your log.
- Think about how elements of this text can relate to other texts that you have read.
- Read the text in context - consider the time period in which it was written and the social and political atmosphere. How does the author reveal these contextual elements in the text? Does the author effectively reveal a particular position on an issue? What word choices does the other make to accomplish this?

Before annotating, *pre-read* the text to discover the themes, points, language and rhetorical strategies the author uses in developing meaning in the text.

Annotating

Annotating is essential for close and critical reading of texts in preparation for class discussions/seminars, writing assignments, analyses, research, and test/exam responses. Because you purchased your texts, you have the opportunity to mark them. Establishing a structured method of annotating will assist you in college and the business world, situations where close reading contributes to success. Furthermore, annotating helps you dissect difficult texts and discern meaning from them. Many students have practiced a rather free-form method of annotation and highlighting, making their texts look pretty, but providing little utility when it comes to understanding the meaning. We tend to get lost in the muck or forget why we marked something. Here are some common methods of annotating:

- Circle phrases you find pithy, represent repetitive themes or images (motifs), and/or reveal figurative language.
- Note shifts in pronoun usage/narrative point of view.

- Circle words the author uses for their connotative meanings
- Circle words you need to define in the margin
- Underline sentences that stand out, develop an argument, or make a point
- Number related points
- Bracket important sections of text
- Connect important ideas, words or phrases with arrows

In the margins:

- Summarize and number each paragraph (shorter pieces).
- Define the unfamiliar terms.
- Note any questions that come to mind.
- Note possible connotative meanings of circled words.
- Note any significant patterns or motifs.
- Identify any outstanding language usage or writing strategies you discover.
- Identify points or arguments.

Don't simply mark a passage without stating why in the margins (unless it's obvious). Never rely on your memory because when referring back to your marks, you may not recall the context in which you first encountered the marked passage, so it becomes meaningless unless you reread.

The Reading Log

You should log the texts you read aesthetically (for analysis/rhetorical strategies). For each text include:

- A summary of the text highlighting the major points the author makes
- Who is the primary audience? What clues lead you to that conclusion?
- Your opinion of the effectiveness of the text. What rhetorical techniques do you find particularly effective?
- Three discussion questions.

Developing Discussion Questions

If you maintain an adequate reader-response log and meticulously annotate your text, you should have little trouble developing discussion questions and responding to the analytical essay prompts. Pithy questions are the backbone of a successful class.

- Raise questions that are ripe for discussion, questions that you believe will spark a lively discussion.
- Ask questions that may generate multiple interpretations of the text or that are debatable.
- Ask questions for which you really want an answer. If there is something you are confused about, allow the class to offer their insights as a bridge to understanding.
- Ask questions that lead to an understanding of the text - questions designed to help us all better understand the text and its meanings. Help us all comprehend how the text works.
- Ask questions that focus on the author's word choices and use of language, questions that consider the connotations of words.
- Ask questions that require more than a simple "yes or no" answer.

Remember: In rhetorical analysis, your job is to evaluate *how* authors use language to create arguments, not necessarily to evaluate the merits of their arguments. We do not focus on whether or not we agree with the stands authors take, but how effectively they make them. You will have writing opportunities to utilize rhetorical strategies in creating your own arguments responding to the points the authors make in their essays.

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