Write Here, Right Now: An Interactive Introduction to Academic Writing and Research

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Contents

Chapter 1: Time is on Your Side

Optional – Intro to the “part” which is in our case chapter one.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter we will:

- Introduce the basic principles of a close reading and textual analysis
- Provide basic tools to begin gathering specific evidence from a text
- Read an essay and gather evidence from that essay
- Make an initial exploration into a potential thesis for a close reading

Gathering Evidence

Every close reading begins with evidence. Without evidence, a writer is simply stating their opinion. As such, writing an essay begins well before you even start drafting with the process of gathering evidence. As such, writing an essay begins well before you actually start writing. Very little essay writing is actually writing. Instead, much of writing is:

- **Gathering evidence** (reading the text and taking notes)
- **Pre-planning** (outlines, brainstorming)
- **Research** (of definitions, other scholars' concepts, statistics)
- **Editing** (drafts, possibly requiring a third, fourth, and even eighth draft)

We will outline gathering evidence by modeling the act of slowing down and gathering all the observations that are to be had within a text. Watch the following video, then read the subsequent text for a brief tutorial on the basics of finding evidence within a text.

Intro to Analysis (mock-up draft)

Reading Slowly

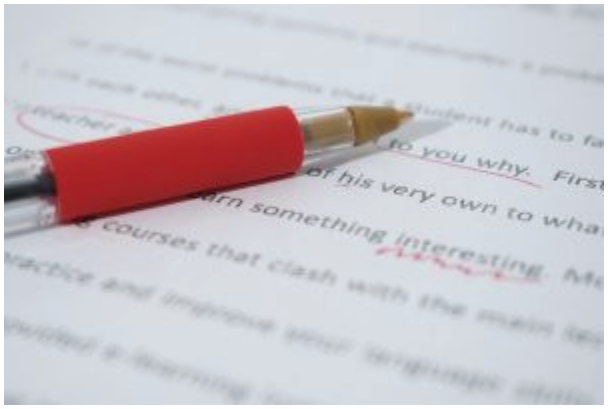
In these early stages of a close reading it is not necessary to find an analytical angle right away or identify immediately the author's overall purpose. You are very smart. At the beginning of your close reading, your greatest asset is time; therefore you should slow down. Analyzing a text is a multi-stage process and as we find evidence from a text you are at the very beginning of that process. The tools we introduce in this chapter will not help you if you do not give yourself the time needed to properly apply them.

In this chapter, you will not be asked to make an argument or deconstruct the author's argument. That will come in the later chapters (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). For now, it is enough to simply notice what you are reading—make a note of things that are interesting, confusing, or repeated. When your task is to analyze a text, resist the need to jump in and begin writing immediately. Instead, to ensure you will be making an argument of adequate complexity, you should devote the time necessary to examine the text thoroughly.

To examine a text closely, you should annotate your experience, take notice, and be granular.

1. Annotate your experience

You will always begin by reading with a pen in hand, underlining and otherwise marking on the text if you own the text or taking notes on a separate piece of paper if you are borrowing the text. If you are reading online, you should get in the habit of annotating your reading experience in some way. You can do this with a digital text editor or PDF editor which allow you to highlight and make notes or comments. Hypothes.is is a free general purpose web and PDF annotator that you can use for that purpose.



Mark down what you notice. From Pixabay.

2. Take notice

During your first read of a text, you should be looking for elements that jump out at you, that you think are interesting or puzzling or that you think may need more attention in a second reading. Underline or highlight words you do not understand, then seek out definitions for those words. If you encounter a word that is new to you, it is likely that the word is significant to the central message or theme of the text.

3. Be granular

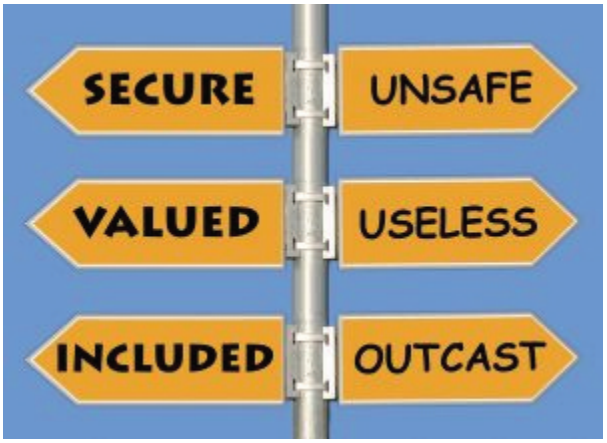
Reading critically requires being granular. It is not enough to flag whole sentences or even whole paragraphs. You must get down to the level of the word. Begin by looking for some straightforward clues:

a. What's interesting? What's strange?What words and phrases jump out at you in the first reading? This may take the form of repetitions; if a word is repeated it is likely central to the author's purpose.

b. What words or phrases are new to you?
You will likely encounter words or phrases that you have never read or heard before. You may also encounter facts or concepts that you are learning for the first time. That's great! Make a note of them and then look them up, or seek out additional information.

c. What patterns are present?
What elements of the argument repeat? This is a slightly more macro approach than item A. A common pattern is the use of synonyms or words that are thematically similar. If there are several synonyms or thematic terms, it is likely the author is focusing on a specific idea or argument that can be conveyed using these words. You might also consider larger sets of words. If, for example, an author is using verbs like "flow" and "poured," nouns like "ocean" and "river" and/or adjectives like "wet" or "fluid," you might note that there are a lot of water-related words. Three or more words in a list of synonyms or thematically related words probably indicates a pattern.

d. What contrasts or opposites are present?
Are there words that are opposites or words understood to be contrasts of one another? The author may use these to establish the main argument by comparing points or establishing a counter argument. It may also be that the author is offering a more nuanced approach to a subject, so it's important to look for **subtle** or **implied contrasts** that are not as stark as good/bad, black/white. For example, an author might use the word "infantilize" and then later "adult"—while the author does not juxtapose the words side by side, the two words are opposites and may be clues about the author's larger argument.



The use of contrasting language in a scholarly text is deliberate and noteworthy. From Pixabay.

As you mark-up your text and make your notes, remember that there is no such thing as too much data at this phase. The more information you have, the more nuanced your reading will be, and the deeper your understanding of the text. You should try to compile exhaustive lists of at least: 7-10 **interesting words**, 7-10 **definitions of new words**, 7-10 **lists of synonyms**, 7-10 **contrasts**.

Reminder

Remember: Do not jump into an argument; you do not need to explain what anything means. Just gather as many observations and potential pieces of evidence as you can.

Example

Watch the following video to see the key steps to gathering evidence being carried out on the essay you read in last week's class. It may be useful for you to review the essay you read last week and the diagnostic essay that you wrote.

An Analysis of the Diagnostic (text draft)

Interesting words or phrases	common good managing creations of the mind useful arts public meaning cultural meaning corporate obsession market value ecologically and ethically dubious fundamental knowledge over-patenting
New words or phrases	Market Fundamentalism ruckus clampdown culture-jammers trademark dilution privatization of words cultural commons land rush biopiracy anti-commons
Synonyms	**Corporate control:** crude, anti-social instruments of control and avarice; Bullying; alarming expansion of copyright law **Creepy control:** managing creations of the mind; useful arts; privatization of words **Theft:** land rush; biopiracy; anti-commons **What's at stake:** modern culture; common good; fundamental knowledge **Money:** robust, innovative and competitive marketplace; monopoly; markets **Market jargon:** Market Fundamentalism; trademark dilution; market value **Be nice!:** sharing; collaboration; public good

Contrasts	intellectual property rights v. “theft” and “piracy”
	useful v. useless
	big business v. new voices
	commercial v. non-commercial
	claim v. inheritance
	barriers v. sharing
	patent v. collaboration
	private property v. public good
	deter v. encourage
	elusive v. secure
	New opportunities v. monopoly
	Commons v. markets

Your Turn!

Activity

Read the following essay. On a separate piece of paper, identify 7-10 **interesting words**, 7-10 **definitions of new words**, 7-10 **lists of synonyms**, 7-10 **contrasts**.

The Ultimate Communications App

The most amazing invention of all-time, and it belongs to all of us

By Charles Justice

Source: On the Commons, The Ultimate Communications App

I've just invented a new communication app. It can be used by almost everyone; It works anywhere and anytime, night or day; It doesn't need batteries, doesn't need to be plugged in, doesn't even need the internet; Once people start using it, it is so easy that it is almost impossible to stop using it; it becomes indispensable, and you are hooked, you cannot be without it; It can be tailored to suit any occasion; Its use facilitates an expanding network of people; It's use opens up incredible possibilities for creativity and cooperation.

There are only two things that may be problematic with it: my new app takes about four years to download. Yes, you heard correctly, not four minutes but four years. And usually, only ridiculously young kids know how to download it, but, like I said it takes about four years. During that time, the system needs constant maintenance and TLC. The other snag is that once someone starts using it, it becomes common property, available to everyone free, and so I personally, can't get rich off of it.

Are you ready to try my new free app? It's called language. OK, I lied. It's not a new app and I didn't invent it. But everything else I said about it is true, and it was invented by the first humans sometime within the last five hundred thousand years.

What is language? A method of communication that is available to virtually all humans to use. A common way for us to share information and create enduring knowledge. One of the first, but not the first commons created by human collective agreement.

Take a proto-language "Me Tarzan, you Jane". Start with naming, then add verbs to describe action

and emotions. Once you begin to share information you are creating a common space of understanding amongst you and your fellow speakers. This common space can be called a commons.

What is a commons? A commons is a level-playing field. Everybody gets to breathe air, and we have that in common with most other species. Here in the rain forests of the Pacific Northwest, fresh water is a common resource.

We parcel up land into properties, but much land is held in common in the form of parks, trackless wilderness, public rights of way and public spaces. The sunlight that falls to earth is common to all, plants and animals on land , fish and the whales in the sea.

Before the human development of agriculture and domestication humans lived for millions of years in hunter-gatherer bands of approximately thirty to a hundred people. If the band survived and prospered, eventually, as population grew over generations, a new band would split off. As this process continued, a larger and larger area of land would need to be occupied.

Eventually groups that originally were connected, would become separated permanently by mountains or water barriers. Originally we had everything in common. Then because of our success in outgrowing our original environment we ceased to have a common place and identity.

This is probably the basis for the evolution of different languages (see “Tower of Babel”) If we go back far enough in time, all of us living today have a common history, but over thousands of years different peoples occupying different places have come to conflict and cooperation with each other.

Each of us has our humanity and human origins in common with everyone else alive today. Since then, we may have got here in different ways, but we all share the present time in common. We, in fact, share this age in common with the Earth’s biosphere and all its manifest diversity.

What Now?

Now that you've gone through and identified 7-10 interesting words, 7-10 definitions of new words, 7-10 lists of synonyms, 7-10 contrasts, watch the following video and compare your list of evidence to the ones gathered within the video.

The Analysis of the The Ultimate Communications App by Charles Justice (mock-up video draft)

Interesting words	Indispensable
	Creativity
	Cooperation
	Property
	Process
	Human development
	Occupied
New words	Proto-language
	Commons
	Domestication
	Tower of Babel
	Biosphere
	Manifest destiny
Synonyms/ repetitions	Battery, plugged in, download
	Internet, network, app
	Commons, cooperation
	Download
	Language
	New, invented
	Sunlight, fish, whales, plants, animals
	Evolution, growth
	Cooperation
	Humanity, everyone
Contrasts	Property v. free
	New v. original
	Information v. language
	Private v. public spaces
	Human v. nature
	Present v. past
	Common v. private space
	Collective v. individual

Pause and Reflect

Have a long look over your list of observations and narrow it down to the best two. Review the information you have collected.

- What's connected?
- What are your two best pieces of evidence?

You can do this group alike observations together, thinking which observations are the strongest and most interesting, and which observations are the most complex. Your pieces of evidence should be something you can literally put your finger on: a writer cannot put a finger on "tone"; they must put their finger on a single word or phrase (not a sentence) that evokes "tone." Your observations must then be one to three word phrases (ex. "Age of citizen"). Also consider whether your **two best key observations** give differing parts of your argument; if you choose two pieces of evidence that repeat the same argument, you end up building a repetitive argument that likely will not develop the level of complexity that is required to write at a university level.

As a helpful example, here is the observational paragraph we wrote using 2 key pieces of evidence we found in our analysis of the diagnostic essay, David Bollier's "The Plot to Privatize Common Knowledge".

Though he is quick to clarify that he "straight-up" believes in copyrights and patents, Bollier is also equally quick to establish his claim that contemporary corporations have converted these property rights and claims into "crude, anti-social instruments of control and avarice." He very clearly establishes a binary between these greedy corporations rushing to privatize, manage, and outright own songs, words and even prefixes, and the public who seek only to share "fundamental knowledge" for the sake of the "common good." Through continued use of this contrast, Bollier makes certain his readers cannot miss what is really at stake in this quest to manage "creations of the mind": an "over-patenting" of thought to the point where the average person can no longer access freely the accumulated wisdom of humanity.

Looking back over the list of data we gathered when examining Bollier's essay, you will probably notice that this paragraph grew from the binaries "commercial v. non-commercial" and "commons v. markets." Considering the rest of the data in the light of these binaries, it became obvious that our lists of synonyms labeled "corporate control" and "what's at stake" fit into either side of these binaries. Using this information we were able to create a paragraph in which we begin to propose what Bollier is really doing here.

Thinking Ahead...

Get ready to organize your thoughts on the text. From Pixabay.

Compare the paragraph you just created to the essay you wrote as part of the diagnostic exercise. Can you see how you have already become more purposeful and analytical in your writing? Now that you are comfortable with information gathering, we are going to take the first steps toward focusing that information into a purposeful thesis. Review the focused paragraph you created and reconsider how you could present as a proposed reading of that text. When you convert that observational paragraph into a paragraph in which you propose your unique and controversial reading of the text, you want to make sure your paragraph captures the main argument presented in the original text while highlighting the article's main points (including any key concepts or theories) and eliminating all extraneous or minor details. In the next chapter we will be working on developing your *opening line*.

You want to lay on a bit of the old razzle dazzle in the opening line. You want to do a little more than simply restate what is in the text. You want your readers to understand right away that this is *your* reading of the text. You are not summarizing, rather you are persuading your readers to see what they can learn about a text by reading it *your way*. So your opening line needs to contain some sort of controversial claim.

Chapter Review Video (text draft)

For the Instructor

Provide your students with a short article they can analyze and submit online for evaluation. Commit some class time to discussing the interesting and challenging words they found and how their initial observations and questions about these words can lead to an interrogative and focused thesis.

In Class

Bring in an image and ask the students to analyze it using the skills detailed above. The image could be a piece of art or an advertisement. Have the students make multiple and miniscule observations and encourage them to develop the most outlandish, controversial claim they can make while making use of specifics from the image. All inferences and claims must be connected to some actual aspect of the document.

Then organize the students into groups of 3-5 and have them analyze an unseen text you will provide them in class. Give the students time to compile information using the techniques detailed in this chapter. But rather than have them simply observe what is there, have them develop an opening sentence indicative of a challenging, scholarly reading. Rather than permitting the students to claim "This text is about…", encourage them to begin their examination into the motivations of the author. Require your students to consider *why* the author is writing, exactly *what* is at stake, and exactly *how* the author best conveys this message. Ask the students to produce a sentence following this format:

Advertising is hard to escape. Learning to analyze it is a useful skill. From Pixabay.

> In "[Name of Article]," [Name of Author] uses [citable textual evidence] in order to [feasible but controversial claim about what this text is *really* doing].

Have the students share and critique their answers to the following questions:

- Which claim was the most controversial?

- Which claim promises the most interesting reading?

Chapter 2: Evidence

Chapter Overview

Chapter 3: The Full Three Storey Thesis

Chapter Overview

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter we will:

- Evaluate the two storey thesis that you wrote in Chapter 2
- Edit and rewrite the two storey thesis statement you wrote in Chapter 2
- Add the third storey to your thesis to complete the first draft of a thesis that will lead to a university level close reading

Chapter 4: From Thesis to Essay

Chapter Overview

In this chapter students will learn the basics of constructing a close reading essay (our version of the 10 on 1) and begin the early stages of turning their three storey thesis generated in the previous chapter into an essay skeleton that is broken down paragraph by paragraph. This will prepare them for the next chapter, which asks them to build body paragraphs from this skeleton.

Learning Outcomes

- Edit the 3 storey thesis generated in the previous chapter and reaffirm the principles of editing (Chapter 3)
- Establish the basic principles of constructing an effective university close reading essay skeleton
- Reaffirm what a conceptual lens as how to use it in a close reading (Chapter 3)
- Reaffirm the principles of the 3 storey thesis

Chapter 5

Chapter Overview

Chapter 6

Chapter Overview

Chapter 7: Making Your Own Argument

Chapter Overview

This chapter will revisit Part 1 and close reading as a way of differentiating a close reading from an author making their own argument, stressing that the principles and components are still all the same but the focus and rhetorical purpose is different. This chapter will also introduce the final essay and the expectations for the assignment.

Learning Outcomes

- Differentiate between doing a close reading (reconstructing another author's argument) and making an argument on one's own.
- Establish what a representative example is when an author makes their own argument
- Establish what evidence is when an author makes their own argument
- Choose a representative example for the final essay and begin analysis

Style Guide Template

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Subtitle Level 2 [H3] etc.

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Page text

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1. Topic 1
2. Topic 2, etc.

Chapter Learning Objectives [H2]

After completing this chapter you should be able to:

Readings [H1]Required Reading [H2]

Writing Analytically. “MSN Spoken Here,” Charles Foran.

- Chapter 1: Powers of Observation

Recommended Readings [H2]

- Reading 1, etc.

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Key Point

Please Note

Pause and Reflect

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Did You Know

Reminder

Activity and Multimedia Visual Cues

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