

Being a Critical Reader

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Before you read

- Know yourself. Are you mentally prepared to focus or do you need to eat, eliminate distractions, exercise etc. Also know how long you can concentrate.
- Know why you are reading. Know why the article was assigned and how it fits into the context of the course.
- Preview the article. Who is the author and what are their credentials? When was it written? Who published it? What do you predict the article will be about? What do you already know about the topic?
- Skim the article. Read the section headings. Look at the pictures or diagrams. Read the intro and conclusion.

As you read

- Highlight, mark, take notes . . . whatever system works for you to keep your mind focused. I usually highlight one main point per paragraph and write a key word next to it to remind me what the paragraph is about.
- Talk back to the article. Use exclamation points, question marks, bullets or any system you prefer to record your reactions.
- Monitor your comprehension. As you read, periodically pause and check if you are understanding. Can you summarize what you just read? Can you mentally picture what is happening? Could you diagram the argument?
- Dealing with new vocabulary. If you have much new vocabulary, you should probably look them up before you start reading. But if it is just a few words, I suggest getting the basic meaning from context, marking the word, and looking it up afterwards. If you try to look up every word as you come to it, you will break the flow of your reading and lose comprehension.

After you read

- Summarize the article. You can do this in paragraph form, an outline, a chart, cartoon or physical model. Use a system that works best for you.
- Prepare questions and comments for class discussion. Certainly ask about parts that confused you. But also ask questions that will help us think about the article more deeply. How could we connect it to topics we've been discussing? How is it working as a piece of writing? Be prepared to direct the class to sections we should focus on.