



Active Reading

Why Good Readers Make Better Writers.

by Anthony Starros, M.F.A.

This Lecture Will be in Three Parts:

1. Strategies for Active Reading
2. The Four Stages of Active Reading
3. Writing a Critique

Don't Read Homework Like You Read a Magazine.

Reading for pleasure is often done *passively*, without the need to organize the writer's ideas or your responses to those ideas. For college writing, though, it is your responses to writing that is important.

Passive Reading: reading done without an active, critical mindset.

Active Reading: using techniques to more fully engage with a text.

Keep Your Focus on the *Meaning*

What a writer *means* can be interpreted different ways by different people, so meaning is important because it clarifies the writer's *Main Idea* from the *General Topic*.

When it comes time to write your essays, it's your own *meaning* that's important.

- **General Topic:** the general subject of a passage (*objective, just the facts*).
- **Main Idea:** the key concept of the topic (*meaning, sometimes opinion*).

The Benefits of Annotating:

The best way to read actively is to *annotate*. *Annotating* is simply writing notes in the margins of a text as you read.

- Annotating will help you locate and interpret the meaning of any text.
- Annotations provide a variety of points to keep in mind while looking for ideas to include in your own essay.
- Annotating will save you time since you won't have to read something over and over again to understand the author's meaning.

Here is what annotating looks like:

"Studying at Stanford, I began to think seriously about class differences. To be materially underprivileged at a university where most folks (with the exception of workers) are materially privileged provokes such thought. Class differences were boundaries no one wanted to face or talk about. It was easier to downplay them, to act as though we were all from privileged backgrounds, to work around them, to confront them privately in the solitude of one's room, or to pretend that just being chosen to study at such an institution meant that those of us who did not come from privilege were already in transition toward privilege. To not long for such transition marked one as rebellious, as unlikely to succeed. It was a kind of treason not to believe that it was better to be identified with the world of material privilege than with the world of the working class, the poor. No wonder our working-class parents from poor backgrounds feared our entry into such a world intuiting perhaps that we might learn to be ashamed of where we had come from, that we might never return home, or come back only to lord it over them."

What kinds of boundaries?

Is this based on money?

Coping & anxiety

Guilt?

How do parents' anxieties influence their children?

There is, though, such a thing as bad annotating:

About eight years ago Mr Starling wrote about Mr Brown who finds tiny body parts which at first might be human body parts to us readers on the frosty pavement outside the butcher's shop, but which turn out to be made of creamy-white ivory and which he puts in an empty plastic butcher's bag anyway and keeps in his fridge until the evening, which he spends piecing and gluing the parts back together and thinking about Mr Chalmers [a museum collector who as a boy had carved a small flat relief of the head of the Roman Emperor Mr Caesar,] and about Mr Frick [who turned raw steel into gilt-framed masterpieces in the nineteenth century] and about the thieves [who had burgled the museum in the first place earlier that day and dropped the broken limbs as they escaped] and imagining Mr Chalmers flattened but unharmed in a childhood accident like his relief of Mr Caesar, and who in the morning begins to write the story I read as a child called Flat Stanley. *by Jeff Brown*
which begins "Breakfast was ready"
who could hit into frames fleshy & water bugles

Helpful Hints for Annotating:

There are key points to look out for in a passage. These 3 *key elements to comprehension* are:

1. **the topic** (what is the subject being talked about?)
2. **the main idea** (what is the writer's point about the subject?)
3. **supporting details** (evidence or examples used)
4. **your responses** (Do you agree/disagree? Why?)

If you've annotated well, you can simply go back and read your notes to help gather your thoughts on the author's main idea and start formulating *meaning*.

Strategies for Active Reading:

1. Always read with a pen or pencil in hand!
2. Use that pencil to annotate
3. Listen to what you're reading ~ consider yourself in a dialogue with the author
4. Compare authors' ideas with what you know
5. Question statements made by the author
6. Identify important ideas and respond with your own
7. Look up words you don't know immediately

The Four Stages of Active Reading:

1. **prep** (*access prior knowledge - what do you know about the subject?*)
2. **read** (*annotate*)
3. **re-read** (*annotate*)
4. **review** (*further develop your own responses from your notes*)

Yes, read it twice.

Just like listening to music or watching a movie, the more often you hear or see it, the more of the fine points you absorb.

Think about listening to a song. Do you really hear and understand all the lyrics the first time you listen to it?

The same goes for reading. You miss a lot the first time you read something, so reading again always helps clarify the author's *meaning*.

To *prep* for the selections in academic textbooks, read the response questions and author's info before you read the selection.

To *review*, just go back and look at your notes, read your annotations, and you'll find a deeper understanding of the author's *meaning*.

Writing a Critique:

“The man who does not read... has no advantage over the man who can't read...”

-Mark Twain

Throughout this course, you'll be reading *selections* (articles, essays, etc.)...

Those readings will then lead into an arena of discussion with your peers (*Discussion Forums*)...

And your Discussion Forums will help you develop ideas for your essays.

These sorts of assignments & discussions will go a long way in helping you articulate your claim (*thesis*)...

And they will help you build and develop a written piece (*your essay*)...

Based on what you have comprehended from the selections you've read (*research*).

A clear, well-articulated claim or **thesis** (the basis of all academic writing) is often based upon a combination of:

- **your beliefs**
- **knowledge gained from research you've done**
- **your personal responses and insights** (*gained from research or from your own life*)

That's why these readings are important. *Reading begins and ends your education.*

You will develop & support your **thesis** by responding to what other professionals, writers, and experts have said about a subject...

And you will be able to learn from these selections by seeing how other people phrase their own ideas.

To help gather your thoughts when researching, write a *critique* after reading.

Each typed critique should be at least one full page, in two sections:

1. **Summary** (*paraphrase in your own words*)
2. **Analysis & Response** (*your reaction*)

Jot down some ideas, clean everything up logically and grammatically, and type it up. Label each section to help organize your thoughts better.

Students often pull ideas verbatim from critiques for use in their essays.

If you take these critiques seriously, much of the information can be useful as **personal insight and analysis**, a valuable component in developing academic essays.

Sally Student

February 14, 2012

English I, #55532

Critique of “The Miseducation of Hip-Hop”

Summary:

This article describes the disconnect between the younger generation, influenced by rap music, and the older generations who misunderstand and condemn rap music. It is a persuasive essay based on personal testimonies, with quotes from college students and faculty. Some believe today’s generation is influenced by rap music which is taking away from their studies and ultimately, their futures. The older generation are making generalizations about an entire genre, claiming it is “heartless, valueless, nihilistic, and certainly anachronistic if not atheistic,” in other words, “downright filth.” And Jamilah does provide evidence that rap music can occasionally be “bad” when students fail to dress to impress, claiming they would rather be true to themselves and continue “keepin’ it real.” The the solution Jamilah offers to this and other problems related to music is to incorporate education about hip-hop culture into academia so that they learn about this influential music through other means besides the media.

Analysis & Response:

The problem with the older generation’s position is that it is not only antiquated, but it also leads to stereotyping. Providing quotes from both college professors and students made this article identifiable and realistic. I agree with the idea that “part of the reason why there is such a generational gap is because so few educators make an effort to understand the times in which they live.” So many teachers fail students in that manner when they refuse to catch up with modern society, embrace new technologies, and stay current with popular culture. While learning

about the past is important in history classes, other classes need to be based in the present. Students can only identify with and learn from material that is relatable and realistic to them, which means talking about events in today’s society. I believe that if there were more classes about popular culture and music like hip-hop that more people would understand this genre of music better and let it affect them in appropriate ways. And I don’t agree with those students who believe showing up to an interview in baggy pants and a do-rag are “keepin’ it real.” I think that we all have to learn when wearing certain clothes and speaking certain ways are appropriate and when they are not. The failure to recognize this is the downfall of hip-hop’s influence. That is why including courses in analysis and history of such music genres would allow students to obtain a greater appreciation and different outlook on society and their futures in it.

Work Cited

Jamilah, Evelyn. “The Miseducation of Hip-Hop.” *Common Culture: Reading and Writing About American Popular Culture* (6th edition). Ed. Michael Petracca and Madeleine Sorapure. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2009. 244-253. Print.

Review:

Passive Reading: *reading done without an active, critical mind.*

Active Reading: *using certain techniques to engage more fully with a text.*

Annotating: *making notes while you read.*

Summary/Paraphrase: *rewriting something in your own words (often without an opinion).*

Three Most Important Factors in a Passage: *1. Topic 2. Main Idea 3. Supporting Details.*

Topic: *the general subject of a passage.*

Main Idea: *the key concept of a topic (meaning).*

Critique: *a one-page typed response to a reading assignment consisting of:*

- a) summary/paraphrase &*
- b) a response to the main idea.*

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