

APPENDIX

HOW TO READ IN COLLEGE

When you begin the reading in this course most of you will be encountering a whole world of new images, new vocabulary, and a density of thought you've never seen before. You probably arrived at college with little experience reading in depth from your earlier education. You come from a world of television and movies where there is constant stimulation, constant movement, and little in the way of complication, all of which might be fun, but it hasn't given you the ability to dig deep into the meaning of things or the patience to work at something for a long period of time. College reading requires both of these skills from you.

Here are a few tips which might help make this new experience a little less traumatic.

VOCABULARY

In the first place vocabulary will be a constant source of frustration for you in this course. Most of you will see words you've never seen before, or words used in new ways, or archaic words whose meanings are very different now. But that should not come as too much of a surprise. Every discipline has a specific vocabulary. In the sciences you will have to learn new words every day. In business and economics there are terms you will begin using which are not part of the vocabulary of ordinary people. Think of the words you encounter in this class in the same way. Knowing these words, like knowing the vocabulary of other disciplines, will give you the ability to be more precise and effective in the future.

Look up words you don't know in a dictionary or ask someone else their meaning.

Try to look for elements of words you know in the new words you encounter. For example: "anthropomorphic" might look alien to most of you. But look again. You probably have heard of "anthropology" and you'll notice a similarity in the beginnings of the two words. You might know that "anthropology" is the study of man. So now you might guess that "anthropo" means man. Next look at the end of the word, "morphic." Have you

heard a word like that before? What does it mean to "morph"? It means to change or be like something (think Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers). So now you have "man" and "be like" as two parts of the word we're looking at. Now you know that "anthropomorphic" means "be like man." When we say that Neptune is an "anthropomorphic" god, it means he's a god who behaves "like a man," that is, he has human characteristics.

Don't get too bogged down in finding the precise meaning of words the first time through your reading. Try to get the gist of an author's points through the context before refining his or her meaning with a thorough knowledge of the vocabulary used.

QUESTIONING THE READING

One way you can make your reading more active is to sketch out, either in your head or on paper, a set of questions which you will try to answer as you are reading. Begin with the following series of questions, leaving room to provide answers:

- What is the thesis or main question the author seeks to answer? Where is it most clearly made?
- Does the thesis get restated or revised in the course of the text? If so, where does this happen, and why?
- What stories or proofs are offered either to prove or to make the thesis clearer?
- Does the author give an analysis or interpretation in order to clarify his/her points?
- What conclusions are reached? Does the conclusion merely restate the thesis? Does the conclusion follow from the examples and stories used in the text?

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Sometimes you will need to go a bit further than this, particularly when reading fiction or poetry. In these types of readings you will need to interpret what you read by asking some further questions:

- what do the details mean?
- is the writing believable?
- what is the context?
- who is the intended audience?
- what isn't being said but is instead assumed or implied?
- what comparisons are being made?
- how does the structure influence the meaning?
- what is the point of view?
- what is the tone (sarcastic? happy? sad? reflective? angry? ironic?) and why has that tone been chosen?

Different types of texts require modifications in how you read them. On the website, under "General Information and Reference" you will find a set of suggestions for how to go about reading the different types of texts you'll encounter in this course. Look those over if you find yourself having difficulties. If that still doesn't help, come and see me and I'll try to show you some ways you might profit from your reading.

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES ABOUT STUDYING

Where and how you read also has a major influence on what you get out of your reading. I realize that most of you have many other commitments in your lives that put reading fairly low on your list of priorities. However, good reading skills (and the good writing skills that flow from them) are essential to getting good grades in college, to being rewarded with learning and knowledge, and also to your future success in the worlds of your careers.

Right now you are asked to make a choice. Choices mean that often you must make sacrifices, giving up something now for something better in the future. You can't have it all. If you want to have fun all the time, or money, or friends, or family, then you probably won't be able to do well in

college. Because college requires that you sacrifice some of those things here and now for the potential of having more of those things in the future. The same is true of those of you who work many hours. You cannot have a full-time job *and* get a real education. Something has to give. Usually that is your education. If that's the choice you make, then be ready to accept the consequences in terms of your grades. If, on the other hand, you choose to do well in college, and devote your energies to the skills needed to succeed in this course and your others, here are some things you might want to consider:

- **Read where you can focus** your attention on what you are reading. That doesn't necessarily mean in a library or even a quiet place, but it must be someplace you can focus and really read.
- **Be interested** in what you are reading. Pretend interest if there really isn't any. Most of what you read in college will not be entertaining in the way that friends, games, television, and movies are. But you are not here for entertainment. Instead you are here to understand. Being interested will help you to understand.
- **Make sure you have enough time.** Make a schedule so that you have at least an hour to set aside on a regular basis to devote to your reading. The kind of reading you will be doing here is not something you can do at the last minute the night before it is due. It will be better if you take it in small blocks rather than one long period of time during which you will get tired and bored.
- **Mastering college reading is hard.** Don't get too discouraged. The readings you see here are chosen in part because they are hard and raise difficult questions. Everyone else will have similar difficulties. Keep plugging away and try to do the best you possibly can. As the semester wears on you will find that the reading

becomes easier. Think of these skills as no more difficult than the skills you learned to become proficient at skateboarding, or snowboarding, or skiing, or whatever other sport or game you may be good at. Those skills took time to develop. These will too.

- **Talk to others about your reading.** Involve your family and friends. Tell them what you're reading and what it means. Often it is difficult to sort through our own ideas about things until we have talked them out. Use others as a sounding board. We'll be doing some of this in class too. Don't feel that "I only understand it after you talk about it in class" is so wrong. As an experienced reader your instructor is someone who can often guide you through the intricacies of your reading and help you see things you might have missed. Try to understand as much as you can before coming to class and reach more complete understanding by the end of the class.
- **Read with a highlighter.** Highlight words or phrases that are new, that you don't understand, or that seem significant to the main thesis or the proofs of that thesis. Highlight summarizing sentences. Highlight words that show the structure, such as "First . . . second . . . thirdly . . .", "in contrast," "similarly," etc.

- **Write in your textbook.** I understand that for many of you your main motivation for not doing so is so that you can get the maximum amount of money back for the book from the bookstore at the end of the semester. But this gets back to the issue of choices again. If you choose to go to college, you should be willing to pay for the books to own them instead of rent them. The cost of a text is no less than what you are willing to pay for a month of cell phone calls (most of which are not essential), or a couple of movies, or cable television, or eating out. But what you get from a text will be with you for much longer than any possible benefit you receive from those activities. By owning texts outright you will be ready to do what you need to do to understand what's in them. You cannot fully understand a text unless you engage with it. You should mark up your texts heavily. In the margins summarize the argument as you see it, write when you agree or disagree, use signs to signify the main points of the argument and when they occur, show connections with "see page . . .," use wiggly lines for difficult passages, pluses or minuses when you get it. In short, engage the text, argue with it, comment on it. Act as if the author is listening to you and that you are engaged in a conversation with him or her.

