

# Advanced College Writing and Research

## Critical Thinking Skills

### Annotating, Summary and Analysis

#### I. Reading Assignment

#### II. Learning Objectives

- 1. Understand the process for effective annotating**
- 2. Recognize the difference between summary and analysis**
- 3. Identify reading and writing techniques for advanced level writing**
- 4. Understand how synthesis correlates to effective critical thinking and writing skills**
- 5. Apply the strategies of summary and analysis to a text**
- 6. Apply the strategies of effective annotating to a text**
- 7. Compose a summary and a analysis of a text**

#### III. Lecture

College students are inundated with a lot of information in a short period of time. Sometimes the feeling of having to remember so much information can become overwhelming to the most prepared student. Much of the information that you will read and/or encounter in college will be unfamiliar to you. You will be expected to learn many concepts, ideas, strategies and other types of information with the expectation that you will apply what you have learned in a meaningful way. Students often believe that they must be brilliant to understand the content in a long textbook chapter, an instruction manual, a literary text or an article in a scholarly journal. This is not true. Once a student learns how to read effectively, he or she will write effectively. It is a matter of learning the skills necessary to do so. One of the most effective ways to learn information effectively is to apply the strategies of annotating, summary and analysis. These skills will aid in your reading comprehension and your ability to look at ideas that go beyond the obvious to critically make an assessment of and practically apply concepts that you may encounter in a text. In this lecture, you will learn the skills of effective annotating. You will also learn how to write an effective summary and provide analysis of a text.

## A. Annotating

**Annotating** is a fancy word that might sound confusing. Actually, it means *to take notes*. When we annotate, we look at the text in a deliberate way, taking note of specific vocabulary, ideas, places of publication and audience. We especially take note of the text's main idea or thesis. This means that we take an **active** role in our reading. To actively read means that we do not treat textbooks, novels and other information that we read in college like a beach-side book or pool-side magazine, merely glancing at pictures and words. It means that *we deliberately take notice of words, sentences and ideas to determine how they create a message*.

There are tools that you can use to annotate such as, highlighters, pencils or pens. Technologically savvy individuals can also use computers and notebooks to record important information. Whichever method you use, you are taking time to make specific notations and markings that will help you to distinguish certain information from others. Some of the most important things to identify as you read are as follows:

- ☐ Thesis
- ☐ Topic Sentences
- ☐ Major ideas in each section
- ☐ Unfamiliar words
- ☐ Definitions
- ☐ Key words
- ☐ Characters
- ☐ Authoritative sources
- ☐ Dates
- ☐ Symbols

Annotating also allows you to ask questions of and make comments about the text. You can write questions and comments in the margins of what you are reading for the following purposes:

- ☐ To number sub points that are not numbered in the text
- ☐ To make comments about pictures and images
- ☐ To ask questions
- ☐ To identify an idea that is reemphasized in the text

- ☐ To write in definitions for unfamiliar vocabulary words
- ☐ To make comments about the author's ideas
- ☐ To identify interesting information that stands out to you

The markings that you use to annotate information should be markings that are easy for you to understand and remember. Most people tend to highlight information using a highlighter and others like to underline information. However, there are other notations and markings that you can use, such as circles, question marks, boxes, numbers, happy faces, stars, squiggles, asterisks, and exclamation marks. Whatever markings you decide to use, make sure that they make sense to you and that they don't confuse you when you go back to your text to study for a test or to prepare to write an essay. Also, refrain from using your highlighter like a crayon. Pages in your textbook should not look like an art project. Remember, you are annotating to differentiate key ideas from the other sentences used in the text.

Annotating is a great strategy to help you with the next topic of this lecture: summary and analysis.

## **B. Summary and Analysis**

Understanding summary and analysis can help you to prepare to do the reading and writing for this class.

The ability for a student to effectively summarize and analyze a text means that he or she can do the following:

- ☐ Locate the **thesis** of the text
- ☐ Differentiate the **main ideas** from specific **supporting ideas**
- ☐ Identify the intended **audience** for a text
- ☐ Look at the text beyond the obvious information in the text to discuss **complex ideas and concepts**
- ☐ Identify if a text's information is **logical, fair, and clear**
- ☐ Identify the author's **point of view, assumptions, and purpose**
- ☐ To evaluate the text's information for **accuracy and depth**

In order to read and write for summary and analysis, you must **actively** read the text. You learned in English 131 that writing is a deliberate process; people write with a **purpose** in mind. A good reader goes to the text with that fact in his or her mind. A good reader can

identify an obvious message and the message beyond the thesis.

## Summary

A **summary** for advanced academic writing is an organized paragraph of at least 8-10 sentences or a series of paragraphs that are  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the length of what you have read. A summary is written in your OWN WORDS. There is no need to use quotations from the text. The student only writes about the major points of the article or story. It is okay to write about supporting points, but it is not necessary to go into extreme detail about the text. The point of the summary is to evaluate the student's reading comprehension.

There are various reading and writing techniques that you need to use to write a good summary.

## Reading Techniques

### 1. Skim the Text

No, this is not cheating; this is being smart. You need to know how much you have to read before you get started. This will help you to plan more effectively your reading so that you can actively read the text. Taking a few moments to skim over the text will help you to prepare to read the text.

### 2. Vocabulary

It is good to be honest with yourself. You can only read the words you know. Words that are unfamiliar to you might as well be written in a foreign language. Therefore, it is important for you mark the words you do not know. Sometimes you might be able to understand the word in context, but there may be times when unfamiliar words will not have "context clues" to help better understand its meaning. Therefore, you must take the opportunity to look up these unfamiliar words AS YOU READ. You can substitute the unfamiliar word or a word that you are more familiar so that you can understand the idea of that particular sentence.

### 3. Thesis

There is no way that you can honestly know what you were reading about if you cannot locate the thesis. In regard to a story, you cannot effectively write about a story if you do not understand the main idea of the story. Thesis statements are important. You must know the thesis to know what you have read. There are no exceptions.

Finding the thesis can be complicated. Thesis statements are not always going to be easy to locate. A thesis can be developed in two ways:

Direct      Easy to locate. It is a clear statement that is found in the introduction and restated in the conclusion.

Indirect    Harder to locate. It is an implied statement that you have to read in context. You must identify a main idea that is developed by other

supporting information.

#### 4. Main Points

You learned in English 131 that all thesis statements are supported by main points. These ideas are the general ideas that will have more specific information to support them. Usually they are topic sentences, but this is not always the case. However, they are the key ideas that help to further explain the author's thesis.

#### 5. Audience

Because writing is purposeful, then there has to be an intended audience. As you read, you should ask yourself:

- ☐ "What person or group is the author writing to?"
- ☐ "What does the author want his or her audience to know after reading the text?"
- ☐ "What knowledge does the author anticipate the audience to have prior to reading this text?"
- ☐ "What attitude does the author expect his or her audience to have about the subject?"

#### 6. Publication

You should always identify the title of the text. Titles can help you to locate or better understand the author's thesis. Also, you will want to identify the company that published the text, especially if it is an article. It will help you to better understand the author's audience.

#### 7. Be Willing to Re-read the Text Many Times

Your skim, first and second read of the text may not be enough for you to fully understand what you have read. You must be willing to read the text as many times as it will take for you to identify the thesis and main points. This means that reading takes time. There may be times when the language, ideas and information are unfamiliar and complex. It is not enough to expect that a first read is sufficient. Often a good first read is a really reliable skim of the text.

### Writing Techniques

After you read to gather information for your summary, then you will be prepared to write a summary paragraph or paragraphs of what you have read. The writing techniques are as follows:

#### 1. Topic Sentence

Every effective paragraph or series of paragraphs have a topic sentence. Your topic

sentence should have:

- ☐ The author's name
- ☐ The type of text (book, story, chapter, article, column)
- ☐ The title of the text
- ☐ The author's thesis

Here's an example of an effective topic sentence: **In Richard Wright's book, Native Son, Wright examines the consequences of race through the life and misfortune of Bigger Thomas.**

## 2. Main Ideas/Points

After you complete your topic sentence, the body of your paragraph should explain the main points of the text. Make sure that you write about the main points the author attempts to convey in the exact same order these points appear in the text. It will help the reader better understand how the author developed his or her thesis.

## 3. Style and Tone

What you are writing is a formal paragraph. It is not a narrative and it should not sound like a conversation between friends. Therefore, refrain from the use of "I" and "you" in your writing. You want to concentrate on conveying the author's ideas so that a person who is unfamiliar with the text can understand the author's ideas.

☞ Also, everything in your summary should be **IN YOUR OWN WORDS!** Do not quote the author's ideas, and do not use language for which you are unfamiliar.

## Review of Summary

- ✓ The student conveys the type of text that he or she read.
- ✓ The student states the author's name and title of the text.
- ✓ The student composes a paragraph that clearly explains the main ideas of the text in his or her own words.
- ✓ The student refrains from use of quotes, narrative language or informal language.
- ✓ The student's paragraph is concise and clear so that someone who is unfamiliar with the text can have a general understanding of the text.

## Analysis

I often use this analogy to explain the difference between summary and analysis:

A store purchased oatmeal cookies containing raisins and nuts, which increased its clientele.

**Summary**= A store bought oatmeal cookies with raisins and nuts that drew more customers.

**Analysis**= A store bought oatmeal cookies with raisins and nuts. The cookies have a hint of vanilla, fresh nutmeg, whole wheat flour instead of all-purpose flour. There is also organic brown sugar that the baker uses in the cookie mixture. The cookies resulted in 100 new customers shopping at the store.

Okay, what is going on here? It's the same situation, but there is something different between both evaluations of the same cookie and its impact on generating new customers.

The difference is that a **summary** explains the thesis and main points, the obvious. One only needs to look at the author's main points to know that an oatmeal cookie containing raisins and nuts has resulted in new customers at the store. **Analysis**, on the other hand, *explains the details*, which in many cases does not state the obvious. In the example above, you would have to read beyond the author's main points to know the specific ingredients contained in the cookie and/or how many new customers the store was actually able to generate in order to properly provide an analysis of the material you have read. When you are writing for analysis, you evaluate the specific information (i.e. supporting details) that is used to develop the thesis. You also go a step further and question why the author uses that particular information to support his or her main idea. This is the basis of effective **critical thinking**. Advanced college writers must read carefully so that they can do the critical thinking that is necessary for effective analysis.

When you analyze a text, you want to annotate, look at your notes and the text and ask the following:

- ☐ What is the author's **purpose**?
- ☐ What **question** is the author trying to ask in his or her text?
- ☐ What is the author's **point of view**? (Is it biased? Is it objective?)
- ☐ Does the author's use of language or use of information reveal his or her **beliefs**?
- ☐ How does the author develop **concepts, ideas, characters, story, and/or plot**?
- ☐ What **conclusions** does the author give in his or her writing?
- ☐ How does the author interpret **data, evidence and information**?

- ☐ How does the author use **data, evidence and information**?
- ☐ Does the author consider other's **ideas or perspectives**?
- ☐ Why do you agree or disagree with the author?
- ☐ How does the author's information relate to your life (if at all) OR how does the author's information impact your life?
- ☐ How can the author's information reveal truths or deception about the human condition?

You will not always ask each one of these questions. HOWEVER, asking questions each time you read will better help you to think about the text in a more specific way. You will be able to look beyond the obvious to critique the details of a text. This is a very important skill for critical thinking and critical writing.

Analysis allows you to ask questions about what you read. These questions can help you to ask more questions or reveal to you information that you cannot get from a summary.

## **Writing Techniques**

In order to write an effective analysis, you will need to think deeply about what you have read. Because you are already familiar with the author's thesis and main points, you should concentrate on answering a few of the critical thinking questions (listed above) and write at least an 8-10 sentence paragraph that consists of the following:

### **1. Thesis**

Because this is YOUR analysis, you should have a main idea that responds to the question that you are attempting to answer. For example, if you agree with an author about her assessment regarding global warming, then your thesis could be, "Jane Doe presents a **fascinating critique** about countries that are against global warming." Once you develop your thesis, it is your responsibility to defend your answer. In other words, what makes Jane Doe's critique *fascinating* to you?

### **2. A clear and thorough answer**

You should want to answer effectively a question for analysis. You should defend your answers using information from the text. This means that **you can use direct quotations**. However, you want to make sure that your answer is not lost in a bed of quotations. Your thoughts should be SUPPORTED by the text.

### **3. Do not manipulate the author's ideas**



Do not manipulate or misconstrue information to support your thesis.

Remember, you are evaluating the information that you have read. It is not fair to take information out of context (or make things up as you go along).

## Synthesis and Critical Thinking

The key to effective critical thinking is the ability to synthesize information. To **synthesize** information means that you will be able to *combine different ideas and points of view from different sources to 1) practically apply complex ideas in various situations, 2) make a critical evaluation about ideas and concepts, 3) effectively compare and contrast ideas, 4) find new meanings from existing information, 5) explain the complexity of "simple" subjects.*

In this class, you are expected to have actively read the text and be able to write about the text in a critical way. Many of the responses that you write will be a response to a question that I have developed that will evaluate your critical thinking skills. It is my expectation that you are actively reading. You should, if you have to, be able to write a summary and do an analysis of the stories and the articles for this class. You will find that your ability to summarize and analyze a text will be an invaluable skill that will help you (in any class or setting) with reading comprehension and critical thinking.