

Rhetorical Reading & Information Literacy

We read for many reasons, among them to get information, to get pleasure, to deepen our understanding, to challenge our perspectives, and to immerse ourselves in new ideas. Regardless of why we read, we need to do so with our minds wide open. This includes approaching the text as a piece of writing and thinking about who wrote it, for whom, and why. As you read for your college classes—and especially this one—please pay attention to both textual and extra-textual information in order to assess the reliability and veracity of information, to filter out bias, and to identify unsupported claims.

When you finish reading, make a few notes in response to these questions:

AUTHOR

- *Do the author's credentials make his or her claims more, or less, believable?*
- *What claim does the author most want readers to believe as a result of reading this text?*
- *What reasons and evidence does the author provide to support this claim?*
- *What does the author have at stake in you accepting this argument?*
- *How does the author come across as a person?*

DISCURSIVE CONTEXT

- *To what prior events, texts, ideas, or arguments is the author responding?*
- *What events, texts, ideas or arguments are ignored?*
- *Does the emphasis seem positive toward the topic at hand, or negative (examples please!)*
- *Does the author use terms or concepts that are unfamiliar to you (and readers like you)?*
- *Does the author adequately cite sources (within the text or at least in a notes section)?*

INTENDED AUDIENCE

- *When and in what publication did this article appear/who was the publisher?*
- *What types of pieces appear in this publication/are published by this publisher?*
- *What types of readers would be interested in this piece?*
- *What values does this piece appeal to?*
- *What emotions does this piece appeal to?*

EXPANDED CONVERSATIONS

Now look carefully at the works cited/reference list (or footnotes if it does not have a specific list)

- *What kinds of texts are cited (look at the title, publisher, date of publication)?*
- *Do you see the names of authors you recognize from this course?*
- *Do you see topics you recognize from this course?*
- *Which authors seem to be important based on how many times they are cited?*
- *Which texts look as if they would help you understand a particular aspect of this topic?*
- *If the reading does not have a list of references, what does that indicate about the source? Why?*

POSSIBLE INFORMATION LITERACY ACTIVITIES USING THIS HANDOUT

Note: many of the following include a shared Google Doc. If you make a folder for the class in GoogleDocs and give each student rights, then any document created in that folder will be shared by everyone in the class.

In class activities:

- Early in the semester, break the class into four groups [a different group each time]. Each group has 10 minutes to answer one set of questions for the text they read for homework and type the answers into a shared GoogleDoc. When they finish, they read each other's answers and add anything they would like to add. You can project the document screen and discuss it, or refer to it as you discuss the reading. You may have a student edit or add to it during class discussion [*NOTE: this could be a Writing Fellow task*].
- Sometimes I ask them to work on a shared document outside of class in preparation for discussion.
- I generally also repeat this exercise for difficult or central texts, or just to keep them on their toes.

Related activities:

- Sometimes at the end of class I ask the students to go back into their groups and each group types into the same document a summary of the reading, a summary of our discussion, a summary of how this text connects to others we have read, or a list of key questions raised by the text and discussion. I respond to this before the next class to correct any errors or add anything that should be included.
- Sometimes I start class with the summary exercise and we go over the reading and then they each revise their group summary.
- Sometimes using the same combination of groups and GoogleDoc model I ask each group to respond to specific quotes I have pulled out of the text
- Sometimes in advance of class I ask them to individually identify a sentence they want to talk about (and explain why they selected it), they type those into a shared document and we go through them in class (often several select the same sentence, so then they just combine their explanation. They are remarkably good at selecting key sentences).

These things take about 10 minutes at the beginning of class, and help to get the students talking and thinking. A Google Doc shared with this many people is a little chaotic, but that tends to wake up the class. Students like these shared documents because they provide "approved" notes on each reading.

Out of class activities drawing on the "Expanded Conversations" section of this handout:

- Using a text that is central to the field (and that I know to contain useful references) I ask each student to complete the "Expanded Conversations" section, and then find the source selected (after a lesson on how to use the library website). If it does indeed look useful they type the full (MLA) citation into a shared Google Doc so the whole class has generated a further reading list. We talk about why they selected those texts, and especially those that several people identified. I might ask them to use one of the sources in an upcoming paper.
- Once we have read several related texts, I ask each group to work with several works cited lists and identify the names that always seem to be cited and note whether it is the same text each time or a different one. Then we make a list of "who's who in this field" and think about what it means that some people are so frequently cited. (We talk about self-citation as well, which is a good segue into a discussion of plagiarism and duplicate submission.)

Expanding Information literacy

- As I discuss readings I often stop and point out places where the source is citing someone else and ask the students to think about why that source was included at this point in the text, how the author is engaging with the source text, and so on.
- Using small groups & a Google Doc, I ask each group to find a place where the author cites a source (first come first served—no two groups can do the same one). Then they need to
 - i) Look up what the source is in the works cited/references list and type out the full citation
 - ii) Note how the source is cited (look it up to see if this is MLA or APA)
 - iii) Look at how the source is introduced—is there a signal phrase? [*you can bring in They Say/I Say here and talk about how the text would look if the cited material were not introduced*]
 - iv) Note how the source is being used (summary, paraphrase, quotation), think about why the author might have decided to reproduce the ideas in that way, and how the reading would be different if the text were incorporated differently (they can even try to paraphrase a quote to see what a difference that would make)
 - v) Look at how the source is incorporated into the text—what the author says about it, how he or she engages with it, whether he or she forwards (expands on), counters (argues with), compares, critiques, or simply reports the information
 - vi) Does the use of this source change the way you think about the author (granting authority, assuring familiarity with the field, identifying a position, etc.)
 - vii) Think about the conversation that is developing between the author of the reading and the source cited.

The ask students to apply these same questions to their own work

I repeat this activity a few times in the semester, especially if we are reading a source that cites other sources we have already read.

ACRL INFORMATION LITERACY THRESHOLD CONCEPTS

“Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.”

The six threshold concepts are listed alphabetically to emphasize that they occur in a different sequence in different people and that learning is not a linear process.

1. Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
2. Information Creation is a Process
3. Information has Value
4. Research as Inquiry
5. Scholarship as Conversation
6. Searching as Strategic Exploration

Association of College and Reference Libraries (ACRL) “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education” *Filed by the ACRL Board February 2, 2015.*