



Active Reading vs. Rhetorical Reading

A-State Online Writing Center

Active reading is an umbrella term for both a way of reading to gain information from the material, as well as practices that help this process. It is, overall, a way of being mindful as you engage in text.

Employing strategies for reading means being aware of your own reading and learning styles, as well as remaining adaptable to new **environments, genres, purposes, and discourse conventions**. You will find that different strategies might work best for different situations and readings, so be open to new ways of reading.

Because each individual is different, and different situations might require different strategies, we don't feel that it is wise for us to prescribe reading strategies as a formula or to suggest that one strategy is better than the other. Active reading also presents a unique challenge: active reading can help you more efficiently retain information from your reading, but may take more time than simply reading and expecting to retain it. How can this be more efficient but also take more time? The answer is in the amount of information you retain. Active reading will help you retain more information, and as you practice your strategies and hone your skills you will discover that you can read and annotate your work more quickly.

The following guide to strategies, provided by Dartmouth, provides many great tips and tricks to help improve your active reading:

<https://students.dartmouth.edu/academic-skills/learning-resources/learning-strategies/reading-techniques>

Rhetorical Reading

Rhetorical reading takes the strategies employed by active reading and uses them to more thoroughly analyze writing for meaning and disciplinary norms and purposes. Rhetorical reading asks you to consider how individual texts fit into the larger texts of the discipline, as well as how the discipline makes meaning at large. Further, rhetorical reading can help you grasp bias and analyze authorial intent by placing the reading in conversation with other, similar texts in the field.

Rhetorical reading may at first seem difficult, or even insurmountable. However, as you continue to read, write, and develop scholarship in your field, you will find that it gets easier. You will more quickly recognize the rhetorical features of writing to gauge it for genre, intent, audience,

and discourse conventions, among others. As you engage in historical research from your discipline you will also find that the discipline is alive and that, just as genres change, so does the discipline as some questions are answered and new ones arise. This kind of disciplinary history can be of great benefit to you as a scholar, as the more deeply you understand the factors that influenced the discipline's development, the better you may speak not only to its present but also its future.

While this may seem to have exceeded your immediate needs, when you really just want some advice about how to read quickly and thoroughly through a disciplinary text, think of how your current practices will influence future projects. For now, though, here are some things to keep in mind as you read rhetorically:

- How is the text organized, and why do you think that is? In other words, in what order is the information presented, and what does that tell you about the discipline in a broader sense?
- What information does the text focus on, and what information is missing? If the text contains a section on the limitations of the study, you might look more closely in here to see what they cover and what still goes undiscussed. This question might not always seem answerable, but as you become more familiar with your discipline, you might discover that these omissions become more and more obvious.
- What words are repeated throughout the text? What words are new to you? What familiar words take on new meanings in a disciplinary context?
- What claims does the author make explicitly versus what claims seem to be implicit?
- To whom is this text directed? Who might be a secondary audience? What markers led you to this conclusion?
- What bibliographic information does the author include for his references? What relation do these texts have to the text at hand? Are any lay articles or trade articles?