

## Handout: Active Reading

In this class we are *reading in the service of writing*, which means reading texts specifically to be used in your own writing. Reading in the service of writing entails reading for meaning but also reading for “ways of thinking,” which means reading essays and literature looking for ways of thinking about things in a different way. *Active reading* is necessary when reading for meaning *and* ways of thinking. Reading in this class is important for locating evidence for your own writing; for identifying assumptions that may lead to interesting paper topics and to practice critical thinking, or questioning everything by looking for what is not said in a text or by analyzing the rhetoric of a text by looking for the ways it constructs what it says.

*Active reading* involves a lot of underlining and scribbling notes all over the text you are reading (or taking notes in a notebook). The following are some guidelines/suggestions:

### Comprehending

1. Take notes in the margins while reading – you’ll forget your thoughts and have to reread
2. Mark the “key” points or new concepts that offer new insights
3. Mark places where the argument is clearly advancing
4. Underline words and concepts you don’t understand
  - first try to define within the context of the essay
  - then look them up and write short definitions in the margins
5. Underline people or other texts mentioned that you don’t understand
  - first try to define within the context of the essay
  - then look them up and write short bios in the margins

### Responding

6. Begin to respond by marking
  - ideas/words you disagree with and think about why
  - holes or discrepancies in the argument
  - assumptions that are made but not explored
  - lies or false evidence
  - evidence that is not adequately analyzed or persuasive
  - ideas/ words that enthrall you and that you want to ponder
7. Mark passages you think might be useful in your papers
8. Write questions that come to you as you read
  - questions about the text
  - questions about larger issues (the connections may come later)
  - questions the text may answer

Being an active reader will make writing responses and papers much easier. Once you’ve read something you can go back to read your active reading notes and use them to respond. It will also help when writing longer essays because you will have already marked passages you want to analyze. Keeping a reading journal is a great way to get your ideas into some written notes – take the time to write a few thoughts about each reading that you want to think about later or bring up in class when we discuss the readings.