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Primis

## English

McFarland, Olsen, and  
Knowles

College Writing  
English 50

Humboldt State  
University  
Department of English





## English

**McGraw-Hill Primis**  
ISBN: 0-390-93845-9

Text:

Cornerstones: Readings  
for Writers  
**Clouse**

**McFarland, Olsen, and  
Knowles**

**College Writing  
English 50**

Humboldt State  
University  
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#### English

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ENGL ISBN: 0-390-93845-9

# English

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## How to Be an Active Reader

Back up and take another look at the title of this chapter. See the word *active*? It is the most important word on the page, even in the whole chapter, because it describes your role as a reader. Perhaps you thought reading was supposed to be a relaxing, passive activity. Perhaps you thought you could carry your book over to that inviting, overstuffed easy chair, sink into the softness, open to the first page, and sit comfortably, waiting for the author to entertain you or inform you or challenge you or amuse you or frighten you or cheer you up. Well, you can—as long as you are reading for the sheer fun of it, just to enjoy yourself. There's certainly nothing wrong with that, especially if you are at the beach or unwinding after a difficult day. However, college reading demands something more of you. You must let go of your passive role and learn to be an active reader, someone who interacts with the text and works at coming to terms with it. That is what this chapter is about—helping you learn strategies for active reading so you can make the most of your college texts.

### ► FACTS ABOUT READING THAT MAY SURPRISE YOU

Before you learn how to become an active reader, you should know the following points about the reading process, some of which may surprise you.

1. *A text is not just a textbook.* The word *text* refers to anything that is read, so when you come across this word in this chapter, remember that it means more than a book with a title like *Principles of Engineering*; it means any printed words.
2. *Readers do not just discover meaning; they help make it.* Many people believe that a text contains specific meanings the writer had in mind and that the reader's job is to discover these meanings. Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! A writer may intend to communicate a particular message, but as a reader you bring all of your own experience and knowledge to a text,



and these influence the meaning you come away with. For example, let's say that you lost a friend to drug abuse. That experience will likely influence your reading of an essay about a college student killed by drugs. You may finish reading that essay with impressions different from those of a student whose life has not been touched by drug abuse. That is, your knowledge and experience will help you make the meaning you get from the essay. This is normal, so do not hesitate to relate what you read to what you already know or have witnessed or have experienced. Your knowledge and experience will enhance your reading.

3. *There is no single, correct meaning for a text.* Since personal knowledge and experience affect how individuals respond to what they read, a text can have as many meanings as it has readers. Of course, many of your textbooks in courses like psychology and history will present facts, and your job as a reader will be to discover those facts, learn them, and repeat them on tests. However, the *interpretation* of those facts—what their significance is—may be as individual as the readers. Thus, when you read in a history textbook about Columbus coming to the New World, you must discover and learn the fact that he touched our shores in 1492. But whether his landing was a positive or negative act is something you must weigh and form an opinion about, and your opinion may differ from those of other readers of the same textbook.
4. *Trust your reactions.* Now that you realize a person's response to a text is shaped, in part, by experience and knowledge, you should come to respect and trust your personal reactions to what you read. Stop wondering if you have the "right" interpretation and recognize that your own thoughtful responses are "right," regardless of whether or not they match the responses of other readers.
5. *Not everything in print is of the highest quality.* There is a tendency to believe that because something is in print, it must be good and it must be accurate. The truth is, however, that a great deal of unimpressive writing makes its way into print. So do not believe everything you read, and do not assume you are not smart enough or something is wrong with you if you question the quality of a text. Learn to exercise your own critical judgment, and rely on it in deciding what to accept or reject. Of course, the more experience you gain as a reader, the more sophisticated your judgment will be.
6. *It's okay to be uncertain.* If you are unsure about what something means or about its quality, just say that you don't know, and then explain why you are doubtful. Similarly, it's okay to reserve judgment about a text while you think things over, and it's also okay to change your mind. A text that forces a reader to think about it or to examine issues before making decisions can be challenging and exciting. Furthermore, you should not hesitate to change an opinion about a text if

a new reading based on new experiences and thoughts prompts you to do so. Change can be healthy.

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## ► THE ACTIVE READING PROCESS

As an active reader, you *interact* with a text. Rather than let the words wash past you, you become involved with the text to discover what it offers and what you bring to it. This process requires commitment from you. You must be willing to invest time and energy, and you must be prepared to read a piece more than once, perhaps even several times. The rewards, however, are great, for you will discover that an active reader learns more, remembers more, and is enriched by the process.

Note: While you are learning the active reading process, keep in mind that you can vary procedures as you need to. Thus, if you are reading something difficult for an important paper you must write, you may find yourself reading several times, marking up the text extensively, and writing an outline of the selection. However, if you are reading an easier piece for your own interest, you will probably read fewer times, underline only a point or two, and skip the outline.

The rest of this chapter describes strategies for active reading. Try them, and if you have any trouble, be sure to consult with your instructor for advice.

### Step 1: Preview the Text

Before reading from start to finish, you should preview the text for clues about what you are getting into with the selection. The following strategies can help you preview:

1. *Find a quiet place and get comfortable*, but not so comfortable that you begin to doze off.
2. *Think about the title*. Does it offer any hints about the selection? Some titles will and some won't.
3. *Check out the author*. Do you already know that the writer is a humorist, a liberal, a newspaper columnist, a political figure? Have you read anything by this person before? If you have any previous knowledge of the author, you may get some clues about what to expect from the piece at hand.
4. *Read any headings, picture captions, items in bold type, charts, and lists that appear*. These offer valuable clues to content.
5. *Read the first paragraph or two*. Often the opening sets the tone of a piece and presents the topic under consideration.
6. *Read the first sentence of each paragraph*. Sometimes these let you know what main points the author will make and how ideas are organized.
7. *Make a journal entry* that records your expectations for the piece as a

result of your survey. Note what you think the subject of the writing is and whether you think the author wants to inform you, persuade you, entertain you, or share something with you. Also note anything else your preview has revealed. Finally, make a list of any questions you have about the piece. You should try to answer these questions when you take the next step and read from start to finish in one sitting.

### Step 2: Read the Text in One Sitting

After previewing the text, you will have expectations about the material and some questions about it. Next you should read the text through from start to finish in one sitting. (Of course, if the material is very long, you may need to take some breaks.) This reading will likely answer some of your questions and cause you to form others. Also, it will likely prove some of your expectations accurate and some inaccurate. Try the following procedures when you read in one sitting:

1. *Once again, get comfortable*, but not so comfortable that you daydream or nap.
2. *Read through the text to get whatever you can from the material*, and don't worry about anything you do not understand. You can deal with that later.
3. *Circle any words you do not understand* so you can look them up later. Similarly, *place a question mark next to any passages that puzzle you*, and you can study those later.
4. *Make a journal entry* that notes your reactions to the piece and what you think the thesis is. Also, write any answers you discovered to the questions you formed when you previewed the text, and write out any new questions you have.

### Step 3: Read and Study

Now comes the time for concentrated study of the text to discover as much as you can about it. Although labeled "Step 3," reading and studying can be steps 3, 4, 5, 6, and so on. That is, you should reread the text as many times as necessary to complete the strategies and learn the information given below.

1. *Grab a pen and prepare to mark up the text* (that is, if it's yours). Pastel highlighters can be good for marking passages to remember in a textbook, but they are not the best choice for the read and study stage of active reading.
2. *Check the meanings of words you don't know*, and write the meanings in the margin.
3. *If one or two sentences express what you think the thesis is, underline that thesis or place a T next to it.*
4. *Underline the most important points*—the points you want to remember

or the author's most significant ideas. Be careful not to underline too much or nothing will stand out—everything will be underlined.

5. *Carry on a conversation with the author* by responding to the text in the margins. If you like a particular passage, draw a star next to it; if you strongly agree, write “yes!”; if you disagree, write “no!”; if you don't understand something, place a question mark there; if you like a particular word choice, underline it. In addition, you can write any other responses that you have—“where's the proof?”; “I've experienced this”; “too emotional”; “reminds me of Gary”; “seems too critical”; “nice image”; “funny”; “ironic”; “point doesn't seem relevant”; “example needed”; and so on.
6. *Make a journal entry that answers these questions:*
  - A. Is the author expressing facts, opinions, or both?
  - B. Is there enough detail, and is it convincing?
  - C. What is the author's tone (serious, sarcastic, humorous, preachy, angry, insulting, etc.)?
  - D. What is the author's purpose—to share something with the reader, to inform the reader of something, to persuade the reader to think or act a particular way, and/or to entertain the reader?
  - E. Who do you think the author's intended audience was, a particular group of people or the average, general reader?
  - F. Does the author rely on reason, emotion, or both?

Note: As an alternative to a journal entry, you can record all or part of the above information in a note at the end of the piece or in the margins.

7. *In your journal, record answers you found to earlier questions* along with any additional questions that you have. You can talk to your classmates and instructors about your unanswered questions.

#### **Step 4: Write for Comprehension**

College reading requires that you read with care, and steps 1 through 3 will help you do that. However, college reading also requires you to remember what you have read, and writing can help with this. To improve your comprehension of what you read and to help you remember it, try one or more of the following writing tasks in your journal.

1. Write out your personal reactions to the selection. Did you like it? Why or why not? Did you learn anything? If so, what? Were you surprised, angered, depressed, reassured, or saddened when you read? Would you recommend the selection to a friend? Are the ideas important? Why or why not? What were the chief strengths and weaknesses in the piece?
2. Write a summary of the selection.
3. Write an outline of the selection that covers the most important points.

4. Write a one- or two-paragraph explanation of how the ideas in the selection relate to what you already know as a result of your course work, personal experience, and observation.
5. Construct an examination that tests understanding of the selection. Then turn around and take the test and check your answers against the reading.
6. Challenge the author by writing an argument against his or her point of view.

### ► A SAMPLE MARKED TEXT

For an idea of what a text can look like after a reader marks it during active reading, review the following selection. Notice that the reader circled unfamiliar words, then looked up the definitions and wrote them in the margins. Also notice that the reader recorded personal reactions along with questions and points of agreement and disagreement. The reader identified the thesis and marked a T next to it and also underlined the important points.

## DOUBLE TALK

*William Lutz*

*I've heard of this, —  
but I'm not sure what  
it means. I don't  
think essay clarifies  
the meaning.*

Lately I have become fascinated with the growth of a new kind of euphemistic language called "politically correct," or P.C. Since the words we use reveal how we see the world—and how we want others to see it—people who use P.C. language want us to see the world their way—and act accordingly. Just for instance: In everyday usage fat people may be called *stout*, *stocky*, *overweight*, *heavy* or even *fat*. But in P.C. language they are *calonically disadvantaged*, *differently sized*, or are *size-acceptance advocates*. Going even further, P.C. language has created new oppressions: *sizeism*, the bias against the *differently sized* that is practiced by *sizists*; and *lookism*, the belief that some people are easier on the eyes than others. (I guess I'm guilty of *lookism*; I do indeed find some people easier on the eyes than others—my wife, for example.)

*—polite;  
indirect*

*Get real! Is  
he making  
this up?*

*arcastic*



more  
sarcasm { I call my two cats pets, but in P.C.  
language they're *animal companions*,  
*friends* or *protectors*. Well, in some ways,  
cats *are* friends and companions, but  
they're still pets, and I don't treat them  
the same way I treat my friends (nor do  
my friends treat me the way my cats  
do). Thanks anyway, but I'd like to re-  
serve "friend" and "companion" for the  
important human relationships in my  
life.

good  
example { In my youth I spent some time at a  
Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children  
in Chicago. Most of us in that hospital  
had had the same bad experience with  
polio. Sure, we were crippled in one  
way or another, and we knew we were,  
but the word *crippled* never bothered us.  
What bothered us were the people who  
treated us as if we were untouchables. [It  
was the *actions* of others, not their  
words, that hurt.] Now, of course, thanks  
to P.C., we would be described as *phys-  
ically challenged*, *uniquely abled*, *differently  
abled*, *orthopedically impaired*, or as having  
*differing abilities*. Just as blind people  
have become *differently sighted*, *visually  
impaired*, *print handicapped*, or have re-  
duced visual acuity, and people who stut-  
ter are *speech impaired*. (What's next:  
Will someone who's dead be called dif-  
ferently alive?) } good  
point  
clever!

group — I have never been fond of the term  
*senior citizen*, but its meaning is certainly  
clearer than *chronologically gifted*. And I  
have no problem with *retirement commun-  
ity*; what is gained by calling it a *senior*  
*group* — aggregate living community? In my lan-  
guage, kids misbehave sometimes, but  
in P.C. they *engage in negative attention-  
getting*, and they don't just learn to read  
any more but to *(interact with print)*.  
I kind of  
like this one

Racial and ethnic groups have al-  
ways been sensitive to the terms applied  
to them, and surely we should call them

So have the  
handicapped

what they want to be called. But to avoid chaos they need to agree among themselves; and we need a consensus — agreement among all users of the language as to what words mean. In P.C., for instance, *Indian* and *Native American* have been replaced by Indigenous People, Amerind or — native Abo-American, short for Aboriginal Amer- — native ican. How many people really know what these terms mean? And are they really an improvement over the terms they are supposed to replace?

disapprove  
of

To their credit, many people who insist on P.C. usage believe that changing our language can eventually change our thinking and thus our behavior—thereby eliminating racism, sexism and all the other isms we deplore. I disagree. We can camouflage our problems, ranging from thoughtlessness to outright bigotry, with fancy “correct” words, but we can’t cure them. Instead, we lull ourselves into the false sense that, in calling a rose by another name, we’ve changed it.

Yes, but people have the right to be called by any name they want—like “black” instead of “negro.” That’s change because it’s respect.

I don’t think  
he finds it  
so funny.

T

I find much of P.C. language absurd and funny—so why do I care? I am concerned, as I said, that its users want to force their view of the world, its people and its problems, on the rest of us. But I have another concern as well: P.C. language attempts to gloss over and distort truth—to prettify it. As George Orwell warned us, “if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.” Compassion must temper truth and reality at times, as when we call mentally retarded children *exceptional* children; but compassion and sensitivity must never be the reason for compromising truth and reality as we experience it. The damage we do to our words, to our minds and to our society may prove to be irreparable.

Wrote 1984 and “Politics and the English Language”; how does thought corrupt language and vice versa? Detail needed.

Nicely  
said ★

Strong ending

---

# How to Read Faster

Bill Cosby

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## ► PREREADING: BACKGROUND

Well known to many for his portrayal of Cliff Huxtable in the popular television series *The Cosby Show*, comedian Bill Cosby's background includes a doctorate in education. In "How to Read Faster," Cosby explains in a casual but knowledgeable fashion how to read more quickly.

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## ► PREREADING: QUESTIONS

1. How much reading do you do?
2. For what reasons do you read?
3. What kinds of reading do you enjoy?

---

## ► HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

doctorate (5)—degree or status of a doctor, granted by a university  
correspondence (7)—letters, mail, written communications  
successive (14)—immediately following

---

## How to Read Faster

Bill Cosby

- 1 When I was a kid in Philadelphia, I must have read every comic book  
ever published. (There were fewer of them than there are now.)
- 2 I zipped through all of them in a couple of days, then reread the  
good ones until the next issues arrived.
- 3 Yes, indeed, when I was a kid, the reading game was a snap.
- 4 But as I got older, my eyeballs must have slowed down or something!  
I mean, comic books started to pile up faster than my brother Russell  
and I could read them!
- 5 It wasn't until much later, when I was getting my doctorate, that I  
realized it wasn't my eyeballs that were to blame. Thank goodness.  
They're still moving as well as ever.
- 6 The problem is, there's too much to read these days, and too little  
time to read every word of it.
- 7 Now, mind you, I still read comic books. In addition to contracts,  
novels, and newspapers; screenplays, tax returns, and correspondence.  
Even textbooks about how people read. And which techniques help peo-  
ple read more in less time.
- 8 I'll let you in on a little secret. There are hundreds of techniques  
you could learn to help you read faster. But I know of three that are  
especially good.
- 9 And if I can learn them, so can you—and you can put them to use  
*immediately*.
- 10 They are commonsense, practical ways to get the meaning from  
printed words quickly and efficiently. So you'll have time to enjoy your  
comic books, have a good laugh with Mark Twain, or a good cry with  
*War and Peace*. Ready?
- 11 They'll give you the *overall meaning* of what you're reading. And let  
you cut out an awful lot of *unnecessary* reading.

### 12 1. Preview—If It's Long and Hard

Previewing is especially useful for getting a general idea of heavy  
reading like long magazine or newspaper articles, business reports, and  
nonfiction books.

- 13 It can give you as much as half the comprehension in as little as one-  
tenth the time. For example, you should be able to preview eight or ten  
100-page reports in an hour. After previewing, you'll be able to decide  
which reports (or which *parts* of which reports) are worth a closer look.

- 14 Here's how to preview: Read the entire first two paragraphs of what-