

The Writing Center @ EOU

Critical Reading and Annotations

Helpful Hints for Critical Reading

1. Start with the title.

When reading academic papers, start by reading the title. In many cases the title will contain key information regarding the content of the paper and give you hints of what to look for. You can also use the title to make a general assessment if the source will be useful for your writing.

2. After the title, read the abstract.

The abstract of a paper provides a concise overview of its content. By gaining an understanding of the abstract, making sense of the rest of the paper becomes much easier. Likewise, you will be prepared to notice important topics as they are explained in more detail later in the paper.

3. Follow the abstract with the introduction and conclusion.

Before reading the body of the paper, read through both the introduction and conclusion. The introduction will provide you with further background information and in many cases complement the abstract in preparing you for the rest of the paper. Similarly, the conclusion of the paper should be read before the body to alert you to important topics to watch for.

4. Read the body paragraphs.

After reading the abstract, intro, and conclusion, you should have a strong grasp on the content of the paper. When reading the body paragraphs make note of each topic sentence. By doing this, you can identify what will be discussed and how it will relate to the rest of the paper. This allows you key in on important points and pay closer attention to critical supporting details.

Tips for Effective Annotations

-When reading academically, use a printed copy. Reading should be an active process. A printed copy allows you to make notes in the margins and underline or highlight key ideas.

- If you run into a section you don't understand, take note of it or write a question in the margin. Revisit it later with the help of a tutor or professor.

- Highlight, underline, or rewrite useful quotes as you find them. If you find something you think you may be able to use in your own writing, make note of it at the time so finding it later is easy.

- Paraphrase important points as your read. By putting things in your own words you will gain a better understanding of the content, and it will make integrating it into your own paper much easier.

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