**Active Reading**

For this course, simply reading an assigned text is not enough. You are going to read using a method that I call *active reading*. When reading *actively* you will:

To help you to perform:

* Read at an unhurried talking speed (and reading aloud can help you to slow down).
* Try using a silly or over-the-top performance. Such performances can keep you interested, reduce anxiety, and open up performance options.

1. **Perform**. Read as if the text is human and speaking. “Perform” the reading according to the interaction between *rhythm* and *meaning*.

* *Rhythm* is “the beat” (an underlying, connecting pattern of emphasis). *Rhythm* *emphasis* places emphasis on the beat and its subdivisions.
* *Meaning* is what the text is saying, both in syntax (sentence structure) and tone (the expression of emotions and feelings regarding someone or something). *Meaning emphasis* places emphasis according to syntax, and places further tone emphasis on top of syntax emphasis.

Each reader chooses how to mold the interaction between *rhythm emphasis* and *meaning emphasis* into one hybrid emphasis. This hybrid emphasis is performed through variations—on the syllable level—in volume, pitch, pause, speed, and harmony. For example, in a growling “Yes, I’m angry!” try out some possible fusions of rhythm and meaning.

1. **Mark**. Have a pencil at hand. Mark those things—words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs—that stand out to you as particularly interesting or useful. Use parentheses, underlining, circles, or whatever. Draw a line in the margin to highlight where you have marked something.
2. **Write**. As you mark, choose at times to write down ideas (perhaps in the margins). You might write:

* Why you marked something (as a clarification, as a reminder, because you agree, because you disagree).
* Interesting ideas or questions that come to mind.
* Jobs to do.
* Symbols, such as arrows, or symbols that you make up, like a symbol that you assign to a theme, or a symbol indicating a word to define.

1. **Look back**. Afterwards, look back over your markings and notes. Actively read your active reading. Add new ideas and questions. Deepen ideas. Define words deeply.

(Practice by actively reading the rest of this document.)

“Writing” as you read will allow you to think more deeply about the text—but don't let it slow you down much—mark and write so that you can think more about selected parts and ideas later. Furthermore, mark enough material to work with, but not too much.

That being said, you can adjust your marks both as you read and later. You can mark a larger part and then mark a part within it, or you can mark a larger part, planning to mark within it later. Or you can mark a smaller part and then mark a larger part around it. Parenthesizing, underlining, and circling can be used in conjunction to establish various levels of focus (for example: parenthesizing; then, within that, underlining; then, within that, circling).

Remember, active reading requires that you first actively read and *then* read back over your markings, questions, and notes. You aren’t finished until you read back over what you marked, writing down any new ideas or questions. Be prepared to discuss at least one interesting item from each major part of each reading assignment.

Ideally, enjoyment will guide your active reading (enjoying the performing, the marking, the writing, and the looking back). You should let yourself enjoy each part as much as you can.

Bonus thoughts on reading:

1. Keep yourself alert and interested by switching between different modes of reading: reading aloud, reading silently, reading with others, etc.
2. Find a good active-reading *production space* (a “set-up” that includes time of day, amount of time, place, methods, materials, posture, attitude, and deadlines). Develop a space that helps you to work toward your goals early and gradually.
3. If you can’t write in your text, use sticky notes or a paper bookmark.
4. Be open to marking different types of ideas. Sometimes we mark or write on a “main idea.” But sometimes we mark or write on a “lesser” idea or a “side” idea. We choose not based on the prominence of the idea, but on whether it draws our interest or sparks our thinking or helps us to do something.
5. Performance and understanding feed into each other: performance guides our understanding, and understanding guides our performance. As we “figure out” the text through this back and forth, we can adjust our performance and understanding. But we necessarily start with ignorance and work from there.
6. We actively read as we progress through our reading, taking advantage of the multiple perspectives that that progress allows. For example, I will have special insights early in the text, before I’ve read much. And I will have special insights during the middle and end, but the early insights remain valuable, and might help me think in ways that the later insights don’t.
7. If you are halfheartedly reading (or writing or thinking), psych yourself up. As with physical exercise, mental and emotional exercise contains a pleasure that sometimes must be worked for (and even “made up”). Halfhearted work is torture, so pump yourself up as much as you can and then continue to adjust your attitude through repeated practice. You don’t have *complete* control over your enjoyment, but you usually have *some* control. Hopefully you’ll find enjoyment from the start, but, if not, push yourself into enjoyment.

A Performed Text

A *performed* (or *moving*) text is something like a film, a theater production, a recorded song, or an audiobook. How do you actively read something like that?

* Perform. A performed text does more of its performance, so you should focus on understanding that performance more deeply, and on the performance choices that you still can make (focusing, wondering, etc.).
* Mark. Often you can’t mark a performed text in the same way that you mark a less-performed text, but with a piece of paper or a computer you can “mark” parts of the text (like “her expression when she says, ‘I’ll get you,’” or “the second verse of the song”).
* Write. Next to your “marking” you can write down ideas, etc.
* Look Over. You can look over your marking and writing, and you can re-read the performed text.