

READING AND WRITING IN COLLEGE

WHY LEARN HOW TO READ AND WRITE WELL?

The better you read and write, the more completely you can connect with your environment and the more control you have over your daily routine. Reading and writing well lets you understand precisely what issues are important and communicate exactly what you want to say about them. These companion skills actually help you get what you want out of life. So reading and writing well give you power – in a variety of ways.

READING AND WRITING AS CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is the highest form of mental activity that human beings engage in, and it is a major source of success in college and in life. Thinking critically involves grappling with the ideas, issues, and problems in your immediate environment and in the larger world. It means constantly questioning and analyzing different aspects of life. Since critical thinking is complex, it requires a great deal of concentration and practice. Once you have a sense of how your mind works at this level, you will be able to think critically whenever you want.

Reading and writing are companion activities that engage people in the creation of thought and meaning—either as readers interpreting a text or as writers constructing one. Clear thinking is the pivotal point that joins these two tasks. With some guidance, learning how to read and write according to different rhetorical modes or strategies (such as describing, narrating, or dividing and classifying) can give you the mental workout you need to think critically in much the same way that physical exercise warms you up for various sports. Each rhetorical mode offers a slightly different way of seeing the world, processing information, and solving problems. So each rhetorical mode is really a different way of thinking and making sense of the world.

READING AND WRITING AS DISCOVERY

In both reading and writing, we often start out not knowing specifically where we are going. As we read, we are following another person's line of reasoning and discovering our own thoughts and reactions in response to our reading material. Similarly, we often don't actually know the points we want to make until we start writing. As we write, we discover what we think and what we want to say.

The physical acts of reading and writing help your mind sort through lots of ideas and help you decide exactly what you think and feel about specific topics. Sometimes new ideas will come to you as a result of something you have read. Or alternatively, you might understand an idea better once you start writing about it. Whatever the case, the simple acts of reading and writing lead to understanding – of both the subject matter and of your own thought processes.

The more you read and write, the more ideas you generate. This is why your instructor might suggest that you read and/or start to write if you are stuck on a topic or don't know what to say next about it. Reading and writing help you to discover and express the good ideas already in your mind.

READING AND WRITING AS NECESSITIES

Most important, reading and writing are necessary for surviving both in college and on the job. On a daily basis, you have to read and respond to a multitude of documents, from endless emails to textbooks to professional reports. In addition, in today's electronic age, you will have to write more than any previous generation ever has. Some of your writing will take the form of reports or projects that extend over a long period of time. Other writing tasks will have to be completed immediately, such as responses to email messages. Whatever the terms, reading and writing will be significant parts of your life throughout college and beyond.

The better your reading and writing skills, the better grades you will make in college and the further you will get in your chosen career. Everything you learn about reading and writing in this course applies to all your courses. These strategies will also be helpful on the job, especially when you have to read a dense analysis, write that difficult report, or summarize your accomplishments for a professional evaluation. The same reading and writing guidelines apply to all communication tasks.