

dissenting points of view but rather to make money. And a newspaper makes money only when it caters to the beliefs and preconceptions of its readers. Thus, newspapers rarely present radically dissenting perspectives, and when they do, they emphasize that these are merely opinions.

Critical readers read all editorials with equal sympathy. They read to discover and digest a wide range of points of view, especially points of view that tend to be ignored in the mainstream of the culture. To enhance their breadth of vision while avoiding ethnocentrism and sociocentrism, critical readers search out dissenting media sources.

Taking Ownership of What You Read: Mark it Up

When you were a student in elementary school you probably were taught never to write in your books, and no doubt this was necessary, as other students would be using the book after you. This situation is altered when you own a book and are reading a challenging work of substance. Close reading requires a) that we interact with the text by making specific decisions about meanings in the text, b) that we write the ideas we are reading as we read, and c) that we connect important ideas to ideas we already understand and use.

One of the best ways to do this is by inserting markings in books as you read them — highlighting key ideas, questions, facts, assumptions, implications, points of view, doubts, and wonderings. You can do this in many ways, but the best ways are those you develop for yourself. Here are some ideas you might find useful in developing your own system of markings. Start with just a couple of these markings and add more when you are ready.

1. **Circle important concepts and underline their definitions:** As you read, circle the foundational ideas; underline the definitions the author is giving those ideas. Then draw a line between the two so you remember they are connected. (The foundational ideas are those that explain most or many of the other ideas. Make free use of a good dictionary if a word is not clear.)
2. **Make exclamation marks (in the margins) beside important conclusions:** You might use one exclamation mark for an important conclusion, two for an even more important one, and three for a crucial one (!, !!, !!!).
3. **Put a question mark in the margin whenever you don't understand something:** As you read, routinely ask yourself: Do I understand what the author is saying? Whenever you don't, write your question in the margin, or just put a question mark there (?). Later come back to your questions and see if you can answer them, having read further.
4. **Note important problems or issues:** Usually each chapter in a book has an underlying key problem or issue. Mark these with an abbreviation such as prob.
5. **Note important information, data, or evidence:** When you come across information the author is using to support his or her conclusions, circle it and note it in the margin as info, data, or evidence.
6. **Record in the margin the author's point of view when you notice it:** Use the abbreviation POV.

7. **Record in the margin the author's most questionable assumptions when you notice them:** Use the abbreviation *assump*.
8. **Record in the margin the most important implications of the thinking in the text when you notice them:** Use the abbreviation *implic*.
9. **Formulate ideas of your own as they occur to you:** You may write these ideas in the margin, on the extra pages at the back of the book, or at the end of chapters. The more you write ideas as they occur to you, the clearer you will be about your own thinking in relation to that of the author. Of course, be careful not to disagree with an author until you are sure that you thoroughly understand him or her.
10. **Diagram important concepts and how they are connected:** As you read, you want to formulate a sense of the whole. One good way to do this is by drawing diagrams that show interrelationships between concepts. Use the pages at the front or back of the book, or in a notebook if your drawings become elaborate and you need more space.

Marking and Abbreviations

Circle around word or phrase	foundational or other important concept
def	an important definition
!, !!, or !!!	important conclusion
prob or issue	a key problem or issue the author is addressing
info, data, or evidence	author is addressing
POV	key point of view
Assump	a questionable assumption is being made
Implic	key implications or consequences
notes in margin or on extra pages	reader's thoughts being recorded
diagrams	drawing by the reader to show interrelationships between important ideas

Reading to Learn

To learn well, one must read well. It is far more important to read a few things well than to read many things badly. Among the things we should read well are substantive texts — texts containing important ideas, texts that ground our thinking in powerful ideas. As we have said, it is quite possible to educate oneself entirely through reading. This can be done if one has the intellectual skills to work through complex written material, enter conflicting viewpoints, internalize important ideas, and apply those ideas to one's life.