

Research Journal 2 - The Proposal

Create Journal Entry

Journal Instructions ^

This Journal is due by midnight Saturday.

Note that there are *two* separate assignments - Please create a **new journal** entry for *each*, so you will post *two* separate entries. Label each with its corresponding exercise number.

1. Page 43, Exercise 1.4 - This Journal Entry builds off Exercise 1.3
2. Page 45, Exercise 1.5 - This is your Research Proposal. It will be submitted for my approval before moving forward with the research project.

This Research Journal is worth 25 points.

about links between wild dogs and domestic ones?

Finally, *relationship-analyzing questions* are among the most common types of inquiry questions. Most questions researchers explore have to do with trying to figure out whether one thing causes another thing or whether one thing is like or unlike something else. For example, does painful correction destroy the bond between a dog and its owner?

EXERCISE 1.4

Finding the Inquiry Question

Review the questions you or your class generated in Exercise 1.3, steps 4 and 5, and ask yourself, Which questions on the list am I most interested in that could be the focus of my paper? Remember, you're not committing yourself yet.

Using one or more of the templates suggested in Table 1.1, craft several research questions that seem to capture what most interests you in the topic. For example,

- What might explain the rise of recruiting violations in the NCAA?
 - What is the connection between having anorexia and the anorexic's relationship with her father?
 - Is it true that the major climate change denial organizations are funded by special interests that oppose cap-and-trade legislation?
 - Is risk-based behavior in extreme sports caused by a certain personality type?
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or relationship-analyzing questions.

2. *To argue.* You know you have a lot to learn about your topic, but you have a very strong hunch about what the answer to your research question might be. In other words, you have a hypothesis you want to test by looking at the evidence. Inspired by a hypothesis question ("Is it true that...?"), you report on your investigation. However, you may quickly move from a hunch to a conviction; and then you move immediately into arguing your claim, trying to influence what your readers think and even how they behave. Your thesis is a statement—for example, *Muslim religious schools in Pakistan are not to blame for Islamic extremism*—that you can probably roughly articulate at the beginning of your project. It may very well change as you learn more, but when you write your paper, your purpose is to state a central claim and make it convincing. Frequently, that claim is stated near the beginning of the paper.

EXERCISE 1.5

Research Proposal

This is an important moment in the research process. How well you've crafted your research question will significantly influence the

success of your project. You can change your mind later, but for now, jot down a brief proposal that outlines your research plan in your research notebook or to turn in to your instructor. It should include the following:

1. Inquiry question
 2. Primary purpose
 - *Explore*: What are additional questions that most interest you and might help you discover the answers to your research question?
 - *Argue*: What theory or hypothesis about your topic are you testing? What is your tentative main claim or thesis?
 3. What, if any, prior beliefs, assumptions, preconceptions, ideas, or prejudices do you bring to this project? What personal experiences may have shaped the way you feel? Before you began developing working knowledge on the topic, what were you thinking about it? What are you thinking about it now?
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Reading for Research

For this assignment, and many others in your other college classes, you will have to read things that you find difficult. Maybe they seem really boring or full of jargon or hard to follow, or perhaps they seem to be all of those things. Aside from procrastinating, how do you deal with that?

Researchers who study reading say that the best readers are guided by a strong sense of purpose—they know why they are reading something and what they hope to get from it. They also have some knowledge of the *type* of text they're reading. They know where to look for what they need to know. More than anything, though, the strongest readers are those who already have some prior knowledge about the subject. Yet even in situations where you have little prior knowledge of the subject you're reading about, you can still read effectively if you read "rhetorically."

Reading Rhetorically

We all learned to read in school, but we probably never really learned how to read *rhetorically*. Reading rhetorically means selecting particular reading strategies that are most effective in certain situations

and for certain purposes and applying them. Actually, you already do this with some texts you encounter every day. For example, there's this:

u stupid girl, why ru upset & worried? i'm not in a mood or stressed so u shouldn't be + def don't b scared of me-i'm a softy! cu in a bit x

Of course you recognize this kind of text as a familiar genre—the text message—and though you didn't write the message or receive it, you know how to read it. You know the language. You know the social situations that give rise to this kind of message. And you know the writer's purpose.

The sentence that follows is from the first line of a scholarly article titled “The Architecture of the Personal Interactive Homepage: Constructing the Self Through MySpace.”

Structural symbolic interactionism understands the creation of self and identity to occur within existing social structures (Burke, 1980, 2004; Burke and Reitzes, 1981; Burke and Tully, 1977; Cast, 2003; Goffman, 1959; Stets and Burke, 2005; Stryker, 1980).

How are you to read something like this with its unfamiliar references to things like “structural symbolic interactionism” and the list of unfamiliar names in the citation? It's likely that your usual reading strategies will fail you here.

In high school, much of the writing about reading you may have done was in English class, writing critical essays about novels, poems, or short stories. In many ways, reading to write about a novel or a short story is quite different from reading to write research essays. For one thing, there are very basic differences between a literary text and a research article. In a short story, the author's purpose may be *implicit*; you have to “read into” the evidence provided in a narrative to make some interpretation about its meaning. An academic article, on the other hand, is *explicit*. The author states his or her conclusions rather than inviting the reader to make a reasoned interpretation. In addition, academic writing, like the previous example, uses specialized language and conventions—terms, references, evidence, and organizing principles that the people for whom the article was intended (usually other experts in the field) can understand. Stories have their own internal logic and language, but these are usually accessible to most readers even if the meaning is not.

Finally, we usually enjoy the *experience* of reading a story, or at least feel something in response to a good one, but we usually read articles with a much more practical purpose in mind: to acquire information.

Shouldn't the fundamental differences between these types of texts mean that the *way* we read them is also different? I think so. But we rarely think about our reading strategies, pretty much resorting to reading the way we always have in school. Maybe you never highlight, or maybe the pages you've read are fields plowed with yellow rows. Maybe you make marginal notes when you read, or maybe you never write a thing. Maybe you always read everything just once, or maybe you read a text many times to make sure you understand it. Maybe you always read every word, or maybe you skim like a flat rock on smooth water. Whatever your reading practices, becoming aware of them is a first step to reading strategically.

Reading Like an Outsider

Why spend precious time thinking about your reading process? For the same reason this course focuses on the writing process: By becoming aware of *how* you do things that have become habits, you exercise more control over them. In many ways, this book is about challenging old habits and assumptions about research, and this includes approaches to reading when you have to write a research essay. For example, consider what's unique about this situation:

- In a general sense, you're just reading to collect information. But researchers use what they read in some particular ways: to provide support for their ideas, to create a context for the questions they're asking, and to complicate or extend their thinking.
- College research often requires students to read the specialized discourses of fields with which they're not familiar. That means they must struggle with jargon and conventions that make reading particularly difficult.
- Typically, the purpose of the research paper is not to report but to explore or argue. Information is in the service of the writer's own ideas about a topic.
- In some classes (though probably not this one), the main audience for the research essay is an expert in the subject the writer is exploring.

In a way, the student researcher has to read like an outsider—or, as essayist Scott Russell Sanders put it, “an amateur’s raid in a world of specialists.” What does this suggest about your reading strategy? First, it makes sense to develop a working knowledge of your topic *before* you tackle the more scholarly stuff. As I noted earlier,

research in reading suggests that knowledge of a subject makes a big difference in comprehension and retention of information. Second, your own purposes should firmly guide what you read and how you read it. Mentally juggle at least the three purposes I mentioned earlier—reading for example, for context, and for challenge. Third, anticipate your own resistance to the scholarly writing that seems “boring.” It’s boring because you’re an outsider and haven’t broken the code. The more you read in your subject area, the more you’ll understand; the learning curve is steep. Fourth, in scholarly writing especially, quickly learn the organizing principles of the articles. For example, in the social sciences, articles often have *abstracts*, *introductions*, *methods*, and *discussion* sections. Each provides particular kinds of information that might be useful to you. It often isn’t necessary to read an academic article from beginning to end. And, finally, the most important thing: Read with a pen in your hand. In the next chapter, I introduce you to some notetaking strategies that encourage you to use writing to think about what you’re reading *as* you’re reading it. Write-to-learn activities such as fastwriting can help you take possession of information and help you write a stronger paper.

Reading Strategies for Research Writers

- First develop a working knowledge.
- Let your own purposes guide: example, context, challenge.
- Anticipate your own resistance.
- Learn the organizing principles of articles.
- Read with a pen in your hand.