

Reading for Meaning

After you've read an essay once, use the following set of questions to guide your re-readings of the text. The question on the left-hand side will help you describe and analyze the text; the question on the right hand side will help focus your response(s).

DESCRIPTION	RESPONSE
I. Purpose	
Describe the author's overall <i>purpose</i> (to inquire, to convince, to persuade, to negotiate or other purpose)	Is the overall purpose clear or muddled?
How did the essay or text actually affect you: did the author's purpose succeed?	How does the author want to <i>affect</i> or <i>change</i> the reader?
	Was the author's actual purpose different from the stated purpose?
II. Audience/Reader	
Who is the <i>intended audience</i> ?	Are you part of the intended audience?
What <i>assumptions</i> does the author make about the reader's knowledge or beliefs?	Does the author talk to or talk down to the reader?
From what <i>context</i> or <i>point of view</i> is the author writing?	
III. Thesis and Main Ideas	
What <i>question</i> or <i>problem</i> does the author address?	Where is the thesis stated?
What is the author's <i>thesis</i>	Are the main ideas actually related to the thesis?
What <i>main ideas</i> are related to the thesis?	Do key passages convey a message different from the thesis?
What are the <i>key moments</i> or <i>key passages</i> in the text?	What assumptions (about the subject or about culture) does the author make?
	Are there problems or contradictions in the essay?
	What bothers or disturbs you about the essay?
	Where do you agree or disagree?

IV. Organization and Evidence	
Where does the author <i>preview</i> the essay's organization?	Where did you clearly get the author's signals about the essay's organization?
How does the author <i>signal</i> new sections of the essay?	Where were you confused about the organization?
What <i>kinds of evidence</i> does the author use (personal experience, descriptions, statistics, other authorities, analytical reasoning, or other).	What evidence was most or least effective?
	Where did the author rely on assertions rather than on evidence?
V. Language and Style	
What is the author's <i>tone</i> (casual, humorous, ironic, angry, preachy, distant, academic, or other)?	Did the tone support or distract from the author's purpose or meaning?
Are <i>sentences</i> and <i>vocabulary</i> easy, average or difficult?	Did the sentences and vocabulary support or distract from the purpose or meaning?
What <i>words, phrases, or images</i> recur throughout the text?	Did recurring works or images relate to or support the purpose or meaning?

Remember that not all these questions will be relevant to any given essay or text, but one or two of them may suggest a direction or give a focus to your overall response.

When one of these questions suggests a focus for your response to the essay, go back to the text to gather **evidence** to support your response.