**How to read critically**

So get this. You can become a successful college writer. But the first step is actually becoming a strong active reader. So much of the writing you do in college is based on the text you read. Now, you read every day-- emails, social media posts, magazine articles, books. That's casual reading. It's kind of like a leisurely swim at the pool. Compared to that, active academic reading is like deep sea diving. It takes more expertise, effort, and curiosity, but is well worth the adventure

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OK. I'm in, you're saying. But where do we start? First, you have to read the text slowly, much more slowly than you usually would. Focus on each sentence, stopping to check your understanding of what the author is saying. And seriously, look up words or concepts you don't know. As you read, annotate to keep a record of your thoughts and responses. Keep asking, what is the author saying, and why.

It's easy to forget your comments, questions, and reactions to a text unless you jot them down as you go. To help you navigate the text, also circle or underline the thesis, main points, and key pieces of evidence. Annotations are just little notes to yourself but they can answer important questions and help you organize your thoughts as a reader.

Finally, take multiple passes through a text, reading both with the grain and against the grain. What does that mean? Reading with the grain means reading to understand. You identify the author's purpose and main ideas so that you can summarize what the text says. When you read against the grain, you get to push back.

Challenge the author and make note of anything surprising or contradictory. This can help you formulate your own view. Try imagining you're having a conversation with the author where you question any assertions or propose alternatives. Challenging authors once you understand their positions isn't rude. It's smart.

So next time you have a reading assignment, try this. Slow down, make notes, and keep questioning. Question yourself to make sure you understand what you're reading. And question the author when something is surprising or when you disagree. Keep working and exploring. And if you go deep enough, you might discover unexpected treasures.