

R.E.A.D.

The first criteria for reading critically are fairly general and are based on four observations of a text: Reasoning, Explanation, Assessment, and Drawbacks—or R.E.A.D. While they do not necessarily require a critical orientation toward the reading, these four concepts can help guide and focus reading. The criteria described below should help direct your thinking as you are underlining and writing notes on assigned reading. You can apply these criteria to almost any kind of text. Once you have used these criteria to help you annotate, you can then more easily write an annotation. An annotation (used as a noun) is a short summary of a reading. While an annotation can take many forms, essentially it is a description (or synthesis) of a reading put in your own words.

REASONING (Purpose)

Why did the author write this piece? What was their purpose? Did they achieve it?

EXPLANATION

Summarize the piece. What is it about? What is the author trying to convey? Include details from the text for support (methods, definitions, key points, results, etc.) to report what the author says.

ASSESSMENT

What do you think about the piece? How does it affect you? Does it change your mind about something or make you think about something you normally would not have?

DRAWBACKS

What limitations did the piece have if any? Was the author biased in any way? Did the author not provide enough information? How could the piece have been improved?

EXAMPLE

In “Strategies for Integrating Information Literacy and Academic Literacy: Help Undergraduate Students Make the Most of Scholarly Articles,” Margy MacMillan and Allison MacKenzie report a collaborative project conducted at Mount Royal University between instructional and library faculty. The authors suggest that as academic articles have become more “specialized” and written for “increasingly narrow audiences” in the last 30-40 years, students are alternatively coming to post-secondary education less prepared to read and engage them. In response to the difficulty students were experiencing in upper-division communication courses, the authors developed reading activities to demonstrate to students how to read scholarly articles. The goal was to determine if intervention reading strategies would help students critically engage in academic writing. These strategies included things such as pre-reading activities, heavy annotation, “dealing with different interpretations,” as well as discussing articles’ broader implications in their field (529). A year after they introduced these reading strategies, the authors administered a survey and reading activity to 47 fourth-year students to determine the impact of the reading curriculum. They found a general increase in confidence among these students in dealing with difficult material. Their analysis of literature reviews from these later courses also suggests that these kinds of reading strategies can have a positive effect in students’ future writing. These researchers suggest that while teaching reading is not something that most faculty think about, collaboration between instructional faculty and library faculty (who bring complimentary skills to information literacy) is “a good place to start” developing a reading curriculum for upper-division, discipline specific reading. Although this research was obviously conducted at a small university and had limited participants, the research appears both promising and effective.

In the first few lines, this annotation introduces the REASONING or PURPOSE of the article.

This section is the EXPLANATION of the article. In this section the annotation explains the content of the article. This article was a research article, so the research protocol as well as results are reported.

This section describes the ASSESSMENT of the article. The article was a fairly straightforward research article. As a result, so is the assessment of it. Also, since the authors did not make claims or statements that were not substantiated with either other sources or their own research, there were no DRAWBACKS reported in the annotation.

In the example annotation, not all of the questions in the R.E.A.D. explanation are explicitly answered. Instead, these criteria should be used as guiding questions when you mark and take notes, but they should not overly determine the reading experience. Instead, they should be “kept in mind” through the reading process, but not overly determine how a response is structured (whether it be an annotation or a simple response to a reading). When you write annotations, introduce both the title of the work as well as the name of the author (or authors). You do not need to identify whether or not the reading is an article or book because this is indicated by the citation. If the title is in quotes, then it’s an article; if it’s italicized, it’s a book. Also, in MLA the first time you use an author’s name, use both the first and last. After that you can simply use the last name. In MLA format, you can use et al. instead of listing names if there are more than three authors (or more than two in APA).