

I.N.F.O.R.M.

When you begin conducting research on either a new topic or a topic that you simply need more information about, you will read sources for informational purposes. While you can apply the criteria described below to any genre of writing, this handout describes methods that will help you read narratives, literature reviews, argumentative writing, descriptive writing, etc. The purpose of identifying these criteria is to help you practice gaining knowledge from and understanding outside sources. The major difference between the READ and INFORM strategies is that the latter are more specific. However, they should be used similarly to help guide your reading and annotating of sources.

INQUIRY AREAS

What areas of inquiry were included in the text? Most topics you will research will have limited areas of inquiry—specific issues that are important to that specific topic. Some of these areas will be major, some minor, and some in between. For example, if you were to write about legalizing marijuana, one major area of inquiry is taxation. You can be on either side of the argument, but a response to it in an argumentative paper would be appropriate because it is now a part of the public discourse of legalization. When you read then, mark in the text or note on a separate sheet of paper what Inquiry Areas are included in the source.

NEGLECTED

In addition to simply identifying the areas of inquiry in a piece of writing, you should begin to consider what the author may have neglected. What was left out of the text or not developed to your satisfaction as a reader? This could range from areas of inquiry, to connections between them, to evidence. Keeping up with Inquiry Areas and what authors attend to and don't will help you compare texts more easily when you write your own papers.

FACTS

When you read academically in order to learn about or gain a perspective on a subject, it is important to stop and look at the facts and details being presented. What do they say? Is the author citing things that are of specific interest to you? In order to keep track of or note important facts, write words or phrases in the margins to identify them to help you remember where they are. Facts also include specific uses of terms.

ORGANIZATION

Once you have identified the Inquiry Areas, you should survey or explore HOW the author has arranged the piece of writing and whether or not that arrangement is significant. How writers put their writing together can sometimes affect how readers respond. Authors can use arrangement to emphasize certain points or to minimize others. If you have clearly identified the Inquiry Areas, you should be able to determine critical aspects of the organization.

RESULTS

Results are what writers have found or discovered through analysis of texts or as the result of research methods. The results authors cite as an outcome of their research and the evidence they refer to (whether they are referencing their own work or the work of others) are important determiners of legitimacy in academic arguments. I usually mark these simply as "results" in the margins.

METHODS

Methods are one of the most important aspects of academic writing. Writers' methods determine the ways they collect and often analyze data. Methods can range from a theoretical school of thought such as Marxism to empirical methods such as case study, surveys, interviews, etc. It is important to note a writer's methods of interpretation and research in order to more accurately analyze results.

EXAMPLE

Below is an example of an annotation written from an academic article. The annotation is a basic summary of the article. The comments on the side of the annotation describe what specific sections of the annotation are trying to accomplish. As in the other examples, the criteria described in the strategies are capitalized to identify them. These summaries can be especially useful when you begin to write your own academic papers. Once you have three or four summaries similar to the example, you can begin to examine the sources for similarities and differences to produce a review of literature.

In "The Novice Nurse and Clinical Decision-Making: How to Avoid Errors" David Saintsing, Linda M. Gibson, and Anthony W. Pennington discuss the major causes of errors in nursing among new nurses. Their review is an analysis of 75 articles (though they only report on the 20 most relevant) in order to "summarize recent findings related to the novice nurse and clinical decision making" (355). In other words, the purpose of the review is to determine what kinds of errors are made by novice nurses, why they make them, and what kinds of interventions have been proposed to address them. The authors define "novice nurses" as nurses who are newly licensed and/or have less than 1 year of experience. One study reviewed suggests that as many as 53% of new "nurses are involved in errors in nursing care" (355), but also that there appears to be little effort in the field to help novice nurses mitigate these common errors. Areas of error are separated into two categories: the most prevalent errors and minor errors. Among the most prevalent errors are mistakes in medication, client fall, and delay in patient care. Among those, they report that 75% of novice nurses commit medication errors, 20% are involved in client fall errors, and 37% are involved in delay in patient care. Minor errors include issues with documentation, communication with physicians, procedures, using equipment, and not asking questions. Critical thinking and patient load for new nurses were identified as the major causes of novice nurse error. This suggests that overwork and limited real world practice significantly contribute to error. One suggestion made by the authors is that critical thinking should become a more direct and distinct part of the nursing curriculum. However, the authors don't identify how critical thinking is typically taught in the field of nursing. As a result, it is difficult to determine what impact their suggestions might have. They also suggest that patient load is a major factor, but unlike critical thinking, patient overload for novice nurses would have to be attended to in nursing mentorship or hospital practice since it could not be addressed in the curriculum.

The annotation begins by identifying the title of the article, the authors, and the general PURPOSE.

This section references both the METHOD (literature review) and the EVIDENCE.

This sentence provides an important but simple DEFINITION.

This section cites EVIDENCE to describe the PURPOSE of the article.

This section combines INQUIRY AREAS and ORGANIZATION and includes specific FACTS and DETAILS.

This area notes the RESULTS and what the authors discovered

The annotation concludes with an ASSESSMENT on NEGLECTED areas.