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A.C.A.D.E.M.I.C. Reader

Professors and researchers read in order to gain factual information (i.e. to see trends in research, understand part of a discipline they are unfamiliar with, find areas of research that have not yet been fully addressed in their field, etc.) and to gain enough knowledge about an area to begin to make their own arguments and/or to begin producing their own research. When the ultimate goal of research is to join an academic (or in some cases a professional) conversation, your approach to reading shifts, and you begin to engage texts a little more critically. That is, you don't simply let your eyes glide over words on a page, but instead read with a heightened level of awareness about what an author is saying. The strategies described below will help you read many kinds of writing. As you are reading academic articles, try to use these different ideas to help you engage as a reader. As you read researched, academic texts, you will notice that not all of these criteria can be applied to every piece of academic writing, but you should be able to use your understanding of them to annotate, take notes, and write your own summaries and annotations for most academic, argumentative, or research based article. You can then use your note taking and annotating to help keep your research organized and to help you write your own essays.

ARGUMENT (Or Purpose)

What is the main argument, overall claim, or purpose/goal of the article? What is the problem being addressed? An author's overall argument or claim can be either implicit or explicit, though in academic writing (especially research) they are most often explicitly stated. The primary argument should provide cohesiveness to every other category of reading discussed below. Remember, though, an article's purpose might also be to explore a topic and not necessarily "prove" or to argue for a specific standpoint.

AS YOU ARE READING: Primary arguments and claims are usually, but not always, stated very early in academic writing. You can mark these areas as "thesis" or "main idea" when you are annotating. If there isn't a thesis, but rather a goal, you identify that as well. Remember, the point of annotating is to be able to go back to your notes and quickly navigate all areas of an article.

CLAIMS

Though sometimes presented as facts, claims are conclusions authors make about their subject(s). In academic writing you have to earn the right to make claims. Academics substantiate claims through evidence and their analysis of evidence, but the claim itself is a direct statement about what authors are trying to prove or suggest. Claims can either be major global claims under which every piece of evidence and/or analysis fits or minor under which specific pieces of evidence fit.

AS YOU ARE READING: You can use words like "claim" and/or "argument" when annotating a text, or write a short phrase in the margins that identifies more specifically what is being articulated by the author.

ANALYSIS

Analysis cannot always be easily separated from evidence in the context of writing, but they are different. Analysis is the *interpretation* or *explanation* of evidence. In other words, it is the point of view from which the author wants readers to understand the evidence or the author's perspective—this is sometimes referred to as the warrant. Analysis can be very directly related to evidence or more loosely seem like a broad discussion of an article that addresses the content as a whole.

AS YOU ARE READING: You will want to pay close attention to the relationship between the evidence cited in a text, the *analysis* of that evidence, and what broader claims are made out of it. Note where these occur in the text but also ask yourself if there are other ways to interpret the evidence. Also, try to determine if the author has sufficient evidence to make the claims in the text and what other kinds of evidence might also be effective.

DEVELOPMENT

While much of the criteria described in this exercise asks you to look at and consider individual concepts, Development is about looking at articles as a whole. When you are reading academic texts you want to pay attention to how authors move from one point to the next—how they make rhetorical moves as the reading progresses. This will not always reveal interesting factors in arguments, but sometimes it is significant.

AS YOU ARE READING: If a text is long or difficult, it is a good idea to note (either in the margins or on a separate sheet) the different “sections” of a text. It is probably more challenging to read theoretical articles than research articles, but both types can require readers to pay close attention to what different points are being made, how long each of these points is, etc.

EVIDENCE

Evidence (or support or results) is used in many ways and for many purposes—most often to justify a point of view. In academic writing you can't simply make claims about your subject; you have to cite evidence that substantiate your claims. Writers also frequently cite and interrogate evidence from previous authors. Sometimes evidence comes directly from methods being used by the author, sometimes from interpretation of theory, and sometimes from analysis. In narrative writing, personal experience can be used as evidence for an argument.

AS YOU ARE READING: You can simply note areas where authors cite evidence. I usually use brackets so those sections are easy to refer back to. If the author is producing their own evidence, you especially need to identify these sections. Most of the time I simply mark these sections as “results” in the margins when annotating.

METHODS

Methods are usually either (1) the way in which the author collects evidence or (2) a theoretical lens used to base an analysis on. For empirical evidence (evidence that is gathered through observation or experiment), methods can be things like surveys, observations, or scientific experiments. Theoretical methods are usually preexisting schools of thought that ground arguments—feminism and post-structuralism for example. These are more often used for social/intellectual arguments.

AS YOU ARE READING: Pay close attention to the methods being used by the author. Try to determine if the author has made the best choice of method for the research. It is also important to look across all of the readings you plan to use in your own work to see the differences in methods across the articles you are reading, what those methods are, and what the differences mean.

INFORMATION

This covers a broad area. You can think of information as stuff you find interesting and may need to know later (that isn't covered in the others areas). This includes things like interesting statistics, vocabulary and definitions of terms, other authors cited in the text, or references to other research. Keeping track of who is referencing whom or what will help you see trends and overlap in research.

AS YOU ARE READING: Try to note statistics you might use later, write down vocabulary and definitions, etc. When I see a definition in an article I might use later in my own writing, I usually put a square around the word and underline the definition. That way it is easy for me to find later.

CONCLUSION

You may have been previously told that a conclusion is a restatement of a thesis or introduction. This is partially true. The difference between an introduction and conclusion is that a conclusion has the benefit of all of the weight of the article behind it while an introduction does not. That is, a conclusion will often summarize previous arguments made in an article but an author can now take for granted that you have the knowledge *of* the article—which they can't do in an introduction. How an article ends will tell you a lot about how an author views what they have written.

AS YOU ARE READING: Note what final claims are made in your reading, what they mean, and eventually how they relate to other articles on your subject. Also, determine whether or not what the author develops in the article really comes together at the end or if claims are being made beyond the evidence used.

Example 1

The example below is from an article describing a pilot research project investigating the use of sources in student writing. The research methods and results are clearly defined in this piece, which makes them easy to report.

In “Writing from Sources, Writing from Sentence” Rebecca Moore Howard, Tricia Serviss, and Tanya K. Rodrigue study students’ use of sources in academic writing. They hypothesize that both L1 and L2 students “patchwrite” sources rather than correctly summarize sources. They refer to their work as inquiry—stating that their goal is to determine “what questions should be asked and what methods should be used to answer them” in regard to how student use sources in academic writing (180). *Patchwriting* is defined as “reproducing source language with some words deleted or added, some grammatical structures altered, or some synonyms used” (181). Howard et al. collected 18 papers from undergraduate students in a sophomore search composition course in order to determine (1) the frequency of patchwriting, paraphrase, summary, and plagiarism in the papers, (2) how well students understood the sources they were using, and (3) whether or not they were citing sources they used. The small sample size was a result of the “labor-intensive” nature of the research. In addition to reading and coding the student papers, students’ sources were read and analyzed and the alignment between original sources and students’ use of the source was determined. Surprisingly, none of the examples analyzed in the research had a single example of summary despite that fact that, as the authors’ note, “summary is important to source-based writing” (182). They did, however, find significant evidence of copying, paraphrasing, and patchwriting. The report that 89% (all but two) of the papers had incidences of patchwriting, 78% had incidences of direct copying, and 72% had incidences of direct copying not “marked as quotation.” They further discovered that all but one paper reported non-common information without citing it and 14 out of 18 “attributed information to a source that either did not contain that information or said something different” (182). The analysis of student papers and sources revealed that students did not seem to be reading much at all. According to the authors, students seemed to be “writing from sentences selected from sources” rather than critically engaging and writing from the sources themselves. Their primary concern in this article is that since students “cite sentences rather than sources” then writing teachers “have no assurance that the student did read and understand” (186). They suggest that the one factor that complicates being able to determine how engaged students are as readers is that instructors themselves may not “necessarily have any expertise on the topics the students are researching” (188). While the authors admit that their sample size is both small and regional, they conclude that this preliminary research suggests that much more sophisticated research needs to be conducted in order to understand why students make the choices they do when using sources. Although this article is clear and well written, the authors only discuss the importance of using sources briefly. I agree with the authors that a more sophisticated and extensive study needs to be conducted to determine why students patchwrite and what educators can do to mitigate the lack of engaged reading that it suggests.

The first two lines introduce the authors, the title of the essay, and the subject of research.

This section identifies the PURPOSE/GOAL of the article.

Patchwriting is an import word in this article. It is cited and DEFINED here.

This section describes the METHODS used by the authors. Notice the use of specifics.

Statistics from the article are used to report the EVIDENCE or RESULTS of the research.

This section describes the ANALYSIS and SIGNIFICANCE of the evidence cited.

The last lines address a NEGLECTED aspect of the article.

Example 2

Below is an example of a text written from a research article. While the example below focuses fairly evenly on the text, in your own writing you might find the need to emphasize certain parts of a reading more than others—such as methodology. The article described in the summary below describes a case study.

In “Increasing Students’ Understanding of College-Level Reading Materials,” Daryl Kelley and Kurt Borchard address the lack of critical reading skills in college students. They argue that “many new university students have yet to acquire the varied and sophisticated reading skills” (47) they need to be successful and engaged in college and that these “skills will greatly enhance their understanding of a given discipline” (48). They claim that the major factor for this lack of reading skills demonstrated by undergraduate students is that faculty do not directly teach students how to critically engage in disciplinary texts. They contend that this lack of critical reading makes it difficult for students to fully participate in class discussion and that teaching students critical reading skills explicitly will “enhance” their “journey to become educated persons” and argue that instructors need to more “help students make the connection between reading and critical thinking” (50). Kelly and Borchard describe a case study of an undergraduate course in sociology in which they structured their curriculum to get students to read more critically. Their curriculum largely focused on getting students to slow down and focus while they were reading. They divide their analysis of their case study into three categories: “Scientific Reading,” “Value Reading,” and “Reflective Reading.” The section titled “Scientific Reading,” describes the importance in getting students to understand the implications, advantages, and disadvantages of the methods being used in sociology writing. The “Value Reading” section describes the difficulty in getting students to “critically analyze what values might be embedded in texts” (56). Using two strategies—social policy making and role playing—they demonstrate to students how values are embedded in academic texts and to emphasize to students that an important part of academic reading and writing is to “expose” those values. In their course they use C. Wright Mills definition of “sociological imagination” with an ethnographic text to show how theory might apply to practice—describing how they encouraged students to analyze how one author applied a theoretical/philosophical position in a secondary text describing a social phenomenon. These authors argue that an increase in direct reading strategies increases students’ critical thinking skills and helps them to more fully engage in their discipline specific courses. While the strategies used by these authors seemed focused on reading individual text, it is clear by the end of the article that they feel the lack of critical reading creates difficulty for students in attempting to engage in academic reading and suggest that the role of faculty is not just to deliver disciplinary content to students, but to “share our experiences as readers” (60).

The first few lines introduce the title, author, and general PROBLEM addressed. Short phrases from the original text are used.

This section specifies the major ARGUMENT/CLAIM of the article—i.e. the reason the authors conduct the research.

This large section is a description of the authors’ METHODS—in this instance case study. It also includes INFORMATION about the teaching methods used in class, which was the basis for the intervention curriculum.

This section further specifies the curriculum. In addition, it identifies important vocabulary. I add it here because it may be useful later.

The CONCLUSION identifies two of the authors’ major CLAIMS that they were able to identify through the research.

Example 3

In this example, the author doesn't do empirical research—experimental research or research in the field. Instead, she reviews literature about her subject in order to make claims about it to be able to suggest courses of action. Because the method is a review of literature, the annotation blends the description of methods with analysis and results more than the other articles.

In “The What and Who of Information Literacy and Critical Thinking in Higher Education” Rebecca S. Albitz argues that there is a disconnection between librarians and teaching faculty concerning how they discuss and teach information literacy. Her goal in the article is to show why this disconnection exists and to argue that faculty and librarians should begin to communicate more effectively to positively affect students' experiences with critical thinking and information literacy. She discusses two primary reasons that make it difficult to teach critical thinking and information literacy in higher education. The first is that there is no common language to describe either information literacy and critical thinking. In order to demonstrate this, Albitz conducts a search in “both library and education indexes” (98) to show how both IL and CT are referenced by various names depending on what index is used. Albitz also analyses the ACRL's ALA report and “library literature”, which substantiates her claims about the difficulty in finding concrete definitions these terms in higher education and how they overlap. Another problem that Albitz discusses is that since teaching faculty often do not consider Library faculty as equals, there is very little collaboration initiated by faculty to invite librarians to help resolve the problem of critical thinking and information literacy. The result is that teaching faculty often expect library faculty to teach the functional nature of information literacy to students in truncated—one class session—rudimentary, and functional way rather than productively using library faculty to more fully integrate information literacy and critical thinking into a constructive process. Albitz argues that there are two areas that need to be addressed so “information literacy programs can become commonplace in higher education” (106). Definitions of and overlap between critical thinking and information literacy need to be researched more to produce “a set of varying skills” that universities can draw from. Second, a reward structure needs to be instituted in higher education so faculty and librarians can see that administration values these concepts and processes.

As in the other annotations, the first few lines introduce the author, title, and GOAL of the article.

This section introduces the METHODS used by the author, which in this case is a review of literature. It also, at the same time, describes the general CLAIMS in more detail as well as goes into detail about the RESULTS of the ANALYSIS of the literature review.

The last section describes the CONCLUSIONS the author comes to after the ANALYSIS of literature.