

READING IN DIFFERENT VOICES: A FIRST ASSIGNMENT IN CRITICAL READING

"Critical skills are the strategies and tools that we use to creatively analyze, compare, synthesize, and communicate information in order to resolve confusions and solve problems. These skills are prized in every society, but they are essential in modern life where we prize independent, intelligent and imaginative thinking as the key to future progress. The primary purpose of university education is to cultivate these skills in future leaders and professionals." [From *Foundations for Flourishing in University and Beyond* by John Dwyer and Thomas Klassen, 2005].

In the university context, then, 'critical skills' refer to a broad range of skills. This is often confusing to students who use the word 'critical' to refer to finding fault, judging severely or being negative.

Each assignment in this course is designed to help you develop your critical skills. This assignment on *Reading in Different Voices* will focus on the skills needed to read course texts critically and analyse scholarly materials for essay research.

It is possible to read and respond to texts in a variety of ways. In this assignment, you will assess ONE article using three different voices: the voice of the author, an evaluative voice, and a personal voice.

Use the following course reading for this assignment:

ON LINE LIBRARY TUTORIAL ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

As part of this assignment, you will do an on-line tutorial on Academic Integrity. The Academic Integrity Tutorial is designed to help you learn about plagiarism, what you can do to avoid it, and how to generally improve your academic efforts. This tutorial takes about 30-40 minutes to complete. This tutorial can be found at http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic_integrity/. It is recommended that you keep re-doing the tutorial until you have reached 100%. For details on this assignment, <http://www.arts.yorku.ca/sosc/Foundations/> and click on pdf Handout for Students on the On-line tutorials. On completion, print out your quiz results and hand them in with your assignment.

CRITICAL SKILL: READING AND UNDERSTANDING INSTRUCTIONS

A key critical skill is reading, understanding and following directions. You will have an opportunity in your tutorial to discuss this assignment. See course outline for the date. To prepare effectively for this discussion, read over the instructions, answer the questions below, and bring questions to your tutorial.

- *What is the purpose and goal of this assignment?
- *What does this assignment ask me to do?
- *What skills does this assignment ask me to use?
- *Do I need any clarifications -- of terms or expectations?

TIME MANAGEMENT

Students often do a poor job on assignments because they don't allocate enough time to them or they try to do a large assignment in the few days before it is due. Poor time management produces stress and inhibits learning. In order to plan your time effectively, do a time management plan before you begin this assignment.

- *Start by reading the assignment carefully.
- *Break down this project into its different parts.
- *List each step and estimate how much time it will take to complete.
- *Identify the time you have available to work on this assignment over the next few weeks.
- *Develop a plan which indicates by what date you will complete each step.
- *Leave a few days after your assignment is finished before doing the final editing and proofing.

*Keep track of how much time you actually spend on each step so you can assess your time management skills.

For more information, see "Time Management for University Students: Tips to help you make the grade!" <<http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp/index.htm>> and scroll down to time management, and "Time Management for University Students" <http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp/tmonline/time.htm>.

CAREFULLY FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS BELOW.

Do your best to use proper referencing throughout your assignment. See "Referencing Your Sources" in the Skill Kit. Later in the year, your tutorial leader will address referencing directly and you can bring any questions you have to that discussion.

PART I: THE AUTHOR'S VOICE (approx 2 pages)

i) Re-read text and write an annotation.

An annotation summarizes the author's arguments* and conclusions. In an annotation, you are 'speaking' in the voice of the author, using your own words but attempting to be true to the meaning and intention of the author. Your goal is not to evaluate but to represent fairly what the author has said and meant. Since you want to emphasize your own understanding and ability to explain the text, **do not quote directly from the author.**

Do not use excerpts from the text as a substitute for explaining the concepts, argument or conclusions in your own words. Your goal is to demonstrate your understanding of the material.

Speaking in the author's voice does not mean pretending to be the author but rather attempting to represent her views and arguments without your own interpretations.

*You might find this use of the word 'argument' confusing. The everyday use of the word refers to a disagreement or altercation. However in the context of analysing texts, the argument refers to the set of claims made by an author.

To develop your annotation, answer the following questions:

What is the article about, that is, the subject of the article?

What is the author's stated or implied purpose, that is, what controversies or questions is the author addressing?

What is the method of data collection and analysis?

'Method' refers to **how** an author constructs her argument. For example, she may use comparison and contrast, an historical approach, qualitative data such as interviews, quantitative data such as statistics, personal experience, cross-cultural data, theoretical frameworks, the research of others, etc.

What are her findings or conclusions, that is, what is her point of view on the controversies/questions she is addressing? To a degree, the author is trying to persuade the reader to agree with her.

The final annotation should not include all the content or details in the article. Your goal is to highlight the central arguments and the conclusions. Pay attention to the relative weight attached to points by the author and focus only on central points.

Do not write more than one page for your annotation. If your annotation is longer, it is an indication that it is too descriptive. It is easier to write more: the key, however, is to select the appropriate material to answer the four questions succinctly in your own words. So an excellent annotation depends upon selecting the key points, and choosing what to leave out.

ii) Identify and explain 1-2 key concepts which the author uses to develop and support her argument.

A concept helps to explain or make sense of data, detail, information, and experience. It is a general idea or notion that goes beyond the empirical and experiential, beyond what we can observe or directly experience. 'Stereotyping' is an example of a concept.

Concepts are central to the construction of arguments and are the building blocks of theories. So, combining the concept of stereotyping with data on various forms of stereotyping (in advertising, for example) and institutional sites where it occurs (in schools or families) provides the foundation for a theory to explain the devaluation of women's experiences.

Concepts are also 'portable', that is, we can 'internalise' them as part of our knowledge base to help us make sense of other situations. So 'stereotyping' is a concept which can be used to interpret a range of specific experiences. So you might be studying another phenomenon and realize that the concept of 'stereotyping' helps to make sense of it.

Concepts should also be distinguished from 'method' which refers to **how** an author constructs her argument.

Although you may consult a dictionary to deepen your understanding of certain concepts used by the author, be sure to explain the concept **as it is used in the article** and in your own words. Your goal is to demonstrate your understanding of the concepts.

You do not need to translate the concept itself into your own words; so you could, for example, talk about 'colonialism' but the explanation should be in your own words.

PART II: AN EVALUATIVE VOICE (approx 2 pages)

Evaluate and assess the arguments, claims and conclusions presented in this text.

For this section, do not summarize the author's arguments. You have already done a summary in the annotation. You are also no longer speaking in the author's voice but in your own evaluative voice, using analysis and critical thinking to assess the arguments.

The length of the article or how easy it is to read are not relevant to this kind of evaluation; rather, you are trying to evaluate the arguments and conclusions.

For both Part II and III, you may use the first person ('I') when you are presenting your own views. Many of you may have been taught in high school never to use the first person. However in most university contexts, it is critical to use 'I' to distinguish your own views, arguments and points of view from those of others. Note that for neither section are you being asked to state an 'opinion' or a personal preference about the issues raised in the article.

Here are the kinds of questions you **might** answer in order to develop your evaluation.

*Does the evidence adequately support the arguments and conclusions? Why or why not? Give some examples.

Consider the facts, observations, experiences, examples, theories, concepts and research the author puts forward to support her claims.

*Are there weak points or gaps in reasoning? Questions left unanswered? Does the author acknowledge these problems? Explain with specific reference to the article.

*What assumptions does the author make? Are these stated or implied? Are they valid or do they weaken the argument?

Assumptions are those aspects of an author's argument that are taken-for-granted rather than analysed and defended. Sometimes the author is very explicit about these assumptions and other times you need to be an active reader to identify unspoken assumptions guiding the argument.

*Identify areas where the arguments are persuasive and explain why. Identify areas where the arguments are not persuasive and explain why.

COMMON THINKING ERRORS

[Adapted from Research Roadmap at www.info.library.yorku.ca/roadmap]

Logical fallacies: conclusions that do not follow from the arguments (for eg. because A precedes B, it necessarily causes B).

Appeals to emotion in lieu of reasoning.

Ad hominum arguments: arguing against the person making the argument rather than the argument itself.

Ethnocentrism: the belief in the inherent superiority of one's own group, culture, language, religion, or race; and also the tendency to view and judge other culture or groups in terms of one's own.

Stereotyping: everyday beliefs that are accepted without question. Stereotypes assume that all members of a particular group have certain key characteristics in common and will behave in certain predictable ways. Generalizations and judgements are often based on a person's race, sexuality, gender, class or ability.

Assumptions and speculations: assumptions take something for granted; speculations make an educated guess, based on partial evidence.

Hasty conclusions: arriving at a judgement before obtaining sufficient evidence.

PART III: A PERSONAL VOICE (approx 2 pages)

Examine your personal responses to this material and reflect on challenges to your beliefs and values. In preparation for writing this section, re-read the article and place an X in the margin at each point where your attitudes or beliefs are challenged, and a Y at those points where you agree with the argument.

i) Consider your views on this subject matter prior to reading the article. Explore the origins of these views. When, where and from whom did you learn these ideas? Have your views changed as a result of reading this material? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?

It is important to judge an argument on its own merits and not allow your biases and preconceptions to interfere with your evaluation. One way to prevent your biases from interfering with your evaluation is to become self-conscious about these biases, to articulate them clearly and to evaluate them.

ii) Identify and problematize your emotional responses to the issues raised in these texts. Your responses might include anger, confusion, ambivalence, discomfort, excitement, surprise, resistance, denial, enthusiasm, etc.

Ask yourself why you feel this way, that is, problematize (explain and assess) your feelings rather than just describing them.

In Part III of the assignment, you are no longer analysing the text but rather you are 'investigating' your own responses to the issues raised in the texts. As in Part II, you are speaking in your own voice but you have shifted to an explicitly personal and reflective perspective. This means that there are no right answers. However, you are not being asked for a 'personal opinion' about the subject matter but rather **to critically analyse your responses to the material.**

The major factor taken into consideration in marking this section will be your ability to identify, problematize and reflect on your pre-existing beliefs and emotional responses to the material.

An A paper will be elegantly written, well-organized, and without spelling and grammar mistakes. It will carefully address all parts of the assignment. It will have a thoughtful introduction and conclusion. It will demonstrate an understanding of the material, and an ability to identify the main arguments. It will offer complex evaluations of and personal reflections on the material. Do not confuse length with quality. For more information on university grading, see <http://www.arts.yorku.ca/advising/handbook2001/gradingsystem.html>.

TOTAL LENGTH: 6 pages typed double spaced

HAND IN THE ORIGINAL AND KEEP A COPY FOR YOURSELF.

THIS IS FOR YOUR PROTECTION.

DUE: _____ (see course outline; also for information about penalties for late assignments)

Grade: _____ of your final grade

*You will lose 2% if you do not include the completion sheet for the on-line tutorial on Academic Integrity.

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

Before you hand in your assignment, use this checklist to ensure that you have followed all instructions. This checklist is also used by your tutorial leader as a reference point for grading your assignment.

If you find problem areas, revise before you hand in the assignment.

i) Do you have an introduction? It should be brief but outline to your reader what you are doing in the assignment.

ii) Check the length of your annotation. It should be no more than one page. If you have used any quotations in the annotation, remove them. Summarize **in your own words**.

iii) Have you identified and explained **key** concepts?

iv) In your evaluation of the texts (Part II), be sure that you have not simply stated an opinion. Rather you need to analyse the construction of the arguments. Are your assertions supported by evidence?

v) When you speak in a personal voice (Part III), have you **problematized** your feelings? Understanding your emotional responses will improve your critical reading skills.

vi) Have you distinguished among the three voices: the author's voice, an evaluative voice and a personal voice? Remove any overlap or repetition between sections.

vii) Do you have a concluding statement? This should sum up what you have learned as a result of doing this assignment.

viii) Is your writing clear, well organized and coherent?

ix) Have you used sub-headings to indicate the separate sections of the paper?

x) Have you corrected all typing, spelling, punctuation and grammar errors? Do not rely on spell check programs on the computer.

xi) Is your assignment the required length?

xii) Have you followed the instructions for "Presenting a University Paper"?

PRESENTING A UNIVERSITY PAPER

1. The cover page should include the title of your essay, your name, student number, the course number and title, the course director's name, the name of your tutorial leader and the date.
2. Number the pages.
3. Double space your text.
4. Use a 12 point font with standard margins.
5. Indent each paragraph. Do not space between paragraphs.
6. Staple your paper. Do **not** put your assignment in a plastic sleeve or folder.

FEEDBACK ON DRAFTS

Given that this might be your first university assignment, you probably would like your TA to look over a draft. Unfortunately she does not have the time to do this kind of work.

However, there are some options for you:

- i) Visit your TA in her office hour with your draft. She will be able to spend some time looking it over with you.
- ii) Sign up for a tutor in the Centre for Academic Writing [CAW]. If you plan ahead, you will be able to take your draft to your tutor. For more information on the CAW, see the course outline.
- iii) Plan ahead and use the e-tutor service. Send your draft to etutor@yorku.ca and you will receive comments within one week.
- iv) Exchange papers in your study groups. Given the shared knowledge of the material, such feedback might be very helpful.

TUTORIAL EXERCISE ON YOUR ASSIGNMENT

On the day your assignment will be returned, bring a clean copy of your assignment and a one-page statement

- *describing its strengths and weaknesses,
- *and one change you would make to improve it.