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# HOW TO READ A PARAGRAPH

*The Art of Close Reading*



Richard Paul  
& Linda Elder

## The Theory

### The Premise of This Guide

If you can read a paragraph well, you can read a chapter well, because a chapter is nothing more than a collection of paragraphs. If you can read a chapter well, you can read a book well, because a book is nothing more than a collection of chapters.

### Reading For a Purpose

Skilled readers do not read blindly, but purposely. They have an agenda, goal, or objective. Their purpose, together with the nature of what they are reading, determines how they read. They read in different ways for different purposes in different situations. Of course, reading has a nearly universal purpose: to figure out what an author has to say on a given subject.

When we read, we translate words into meanings. The author has previously translated ideas and experiences into words. We must take those same words and re-translate them into the author's original meaning using our own ideas and experiences as aids. Accurately translating words into intended meanings is an analytic, evaluative, and creative set of acts. Unfortunately, few people are skilled at translation. Few are able to accurately mirror the meaning the author intended. They project their own meanings into a text. They unintentionally distort or violate the original meaning of authors they read. As Horace Mann put it in 1838:

*I have devoted especial pains to learn, with some degree of numerical accuracy, how far the reading, in our schools, is an exercise of the mind in thinking and feeling and how far it is a barren action of the organs of speech upon the atmosphere. My information is derived principally from the written statements of the school committees of the respective towns — gentlemen who are certainly exempt from all temptation to disparage the schools they superintend. The result is that more than 11/12ths of all the children in the reading classes do not understand the meanings of the words they read; and that the ideas and feelings intended by the author to be conveyed to and excited in, the reader's mind, still rest in the author's intention, never having yet reached the place of their destination. (Second Report to the Massachusetts Board of Education, 1838)*

In general, then, we read to figure out what authors mean. Our reading is further influenced by our purpose for reading, and by the nature of the text itself. For example, if we are reading for pure pleasure and personal amusement, it may not matter if we do not fully understand the text. We may simply enjoy the ideas that the text stimulates in us. This is fine as long as we know that we do not deeply understand the text. Some of the various purposes for reading include:

1. **Sheer pleasure:** requires no particular skill level.
2. **To figure out a simple idea:** which may require skimming the text.
3. **To gain specific technical information:** skimming skills required.
4. **To enter, understand, and appreciate a new world view:** requires close reading skills in working through a challenging series of tasks that stretch our minds.

**5. To learn a new subject:** requires close reading skills to internalize and take ownership of an organized system of meanings.

*How* you read should be determined in part by *what* you read. Reflective readers read a textbook, for example, using a different mindset than they use when reading an article in a newspaper. Furthermore, reflective readers read a textbook in biology differently from the way they read a textbook in history.

Having recognized this variability, we should also recognize that there are core reading tools and skills for reading any substantive text. These tools and skills are the focus of this guide.

### **Considering the Author's Purpose**

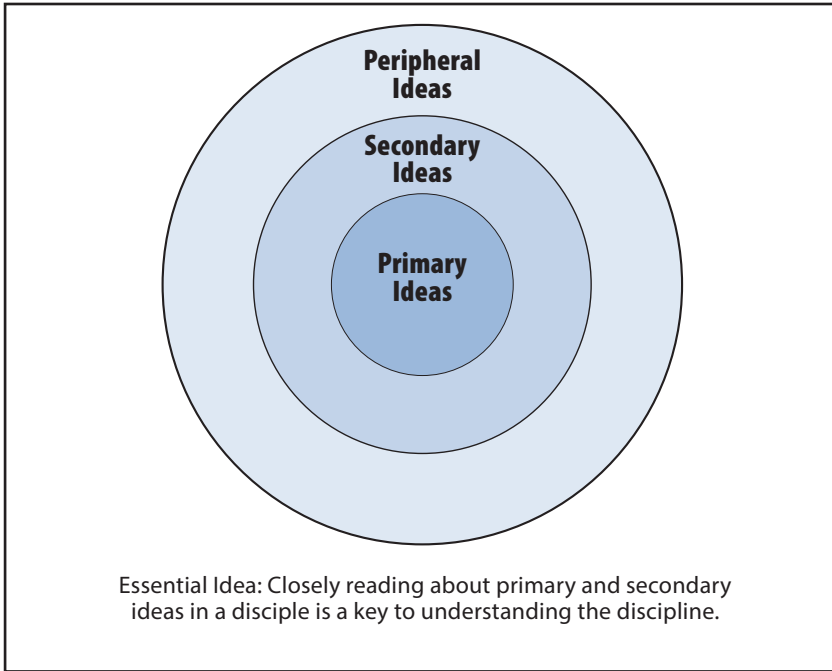
In addition to being clear about our own purpose in reading, we must also be clear about the author's purpose in writing. Both are relevant. Consider the following agendas. Think about what adjustments you would make in your reading given the different purposes of these writers:

- politicians and their media advisors developing political campaign literature;
- newspaper editors deciding which stories their readers would be most interested in, and how to tell the story to maintain that interest;
- advertisers working with media consultants while writing copy for advertisements (to sell a product or service);
- a chemist writing a laboratory report;
- a novelist writing a novel;
- a poet writing a poem;
- a student writing a research report.

To read productively, your purpose in reading must take into account the author's purpose in writing. For example, if you read a historical novel to learn history, you would do well to read further in history books and primary sources before concluding that what you read in the historical novel was accurate. Where fact and imagination are blended to achieve a novelist's purpose, fact and imagination must be separated to achieve the reader's pursuit of historical fact.

### **Developing a "Map" of Knowledge**

All knowledge exists in "systems" of meanings, with interrelated primary ideas, secondary ideas, and peripheral ideas. Imagine a series of circles beginning with a small core circle of primary ideas, surrounded by concentric circles of secondary ideas, moving outward to an outer circle of peripheral ideas. The primary ideas, at the core, explain the secondary and peripheral ideas. Whenever we read to acquire knowledge, we should take ownership, first, of the primary ideas, for they are a key to understanding all of the other ideas. Moreover, when we gain an initial understanding of the primary ideas, we can begin to think within the system as a whole. The sooner we begin to think within a system, the sooner the system becomes meaningful to us.



Thus, when we understand core historical ideas, we can begin to think historically. When we understand core scientific ideas, we can begin to think scientifically. Core or primary ideas are the key to every system of knowledge. They are the key to truly learning any subject. They are the key to retaining what we learn for lifelong use.

We should relate the core ideas we learn within one discipline to core ideas in other systems of knowledge, for knowledge exists not only in a system but also in relation to all other systems of knowledge. To do this, we must learn how to read books for their core ideas and for their system-defining function. Mastering any set of foundational ideas makes it easier to learn other foundational ideas. Learning to think within one system of knowledge helps us learn to think within other systems.

For example: if in studying botany, we learn that all plants have cells, we should connect this idea to the fact that all animals have cells (which we learned in studying biology). We can then begin to consider the similarities and differences between animal and plant cells.

Or consider the relation between psychology and sociology. Psychology focuses principally on *individual* behavior, while sociology focuses on *group* behavior. But one's individual psychology influences how one relates to group norms, and social groups shape how individuals deal with their perceived life problems and opportunities. By reading for the core ideas in both fields and relating those ideas, we better understand the way in which the psychological and sociological are intertwined in our lives.

In the student-generated map of knowledge (next page), note the kind of organizer that one student generated and used to gain perspective on the process of learning. This diagram helps students focus on the logic of disciplines, including recognizing comparisons and contrasts between primary ideas and concepts. A faculty-generated map of knowledge follows on page 6.

### **Avoiding Impressionistic Reading and Writing**

The impressionistic mind follows associations, wandering from paragraph to paragraph, drawing no clear distinction between its own thinking and the author's thinking. Being fragmented, it fragments what it reads. Being uncritical, it judges an author's view to be correct only if that view concurs with its own beliefs. Being self-deceived, it fails to see itself as undisciplined. Being rigid, it does not learn from what it reads.

Whatever knowledge the impressionistic mind absorbs is uncritically intermixed with prejudices, biases, myths, and stereotypes. It lacks insight into how minds create meaning and how reflective minds monitor and evaluate as they read.

### **Reading Reflectively**

The reflective mind seeks meaning, monitors what is being said from paragraph to paragraph, and draws a clear distinction between the thinking of an author and its own thinking. The reflective mind, being purposeful, adjusts reading to specific goals. Being integrated, it interrelates ideas in the text with ideas it already commands. Being critical, it assesses what it reads for clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logic, significance, and fairness. Being open to new ways of thinking, it values new ideas and learns from what it reads.

### **Thinking About Reading While Reading**

The reflective mind improves its thinking by reflectively thinking about it. Likewise, it improves its reading by reflectively thinking about *how* it is reading. It moves back and forth between the cognitive (thinking) and the meta-cognitive (thinking about thinking). It moves forward a bit, then loops back upon itself to check on its own operations. It checks its tracks. It makes good its ground. It rises above itself and exercises oversight on itself.

One of the most important abilities a thinker can have is the ability to monitor and assess his or her own thinking while processing the thinking of others. The reflective mind monitors how it is reading, while it is reading. The foundation for this ability is knowledge of how the mind functions when reading well. For example, if I know that what I am reading is difficult for me to understand, I intentionally slow down and paraphrase each sentence. I put the meaning of each sentence that I read into my own words.

If I realize that I am unsympathetic to an author's viewpoint, I suspend judgment about the text's meaning until I have verified that I truly understand what the author is saying. I strive not to commit a common mistake that some readers make in reading: "I don't really know what this means, but it is wrong, wrong, wrong!" Instead, I try to accurately understand the author's viewpoint while reading. I attempt to enter that viewpoint, to

# Student-Generated Map of Knowledge

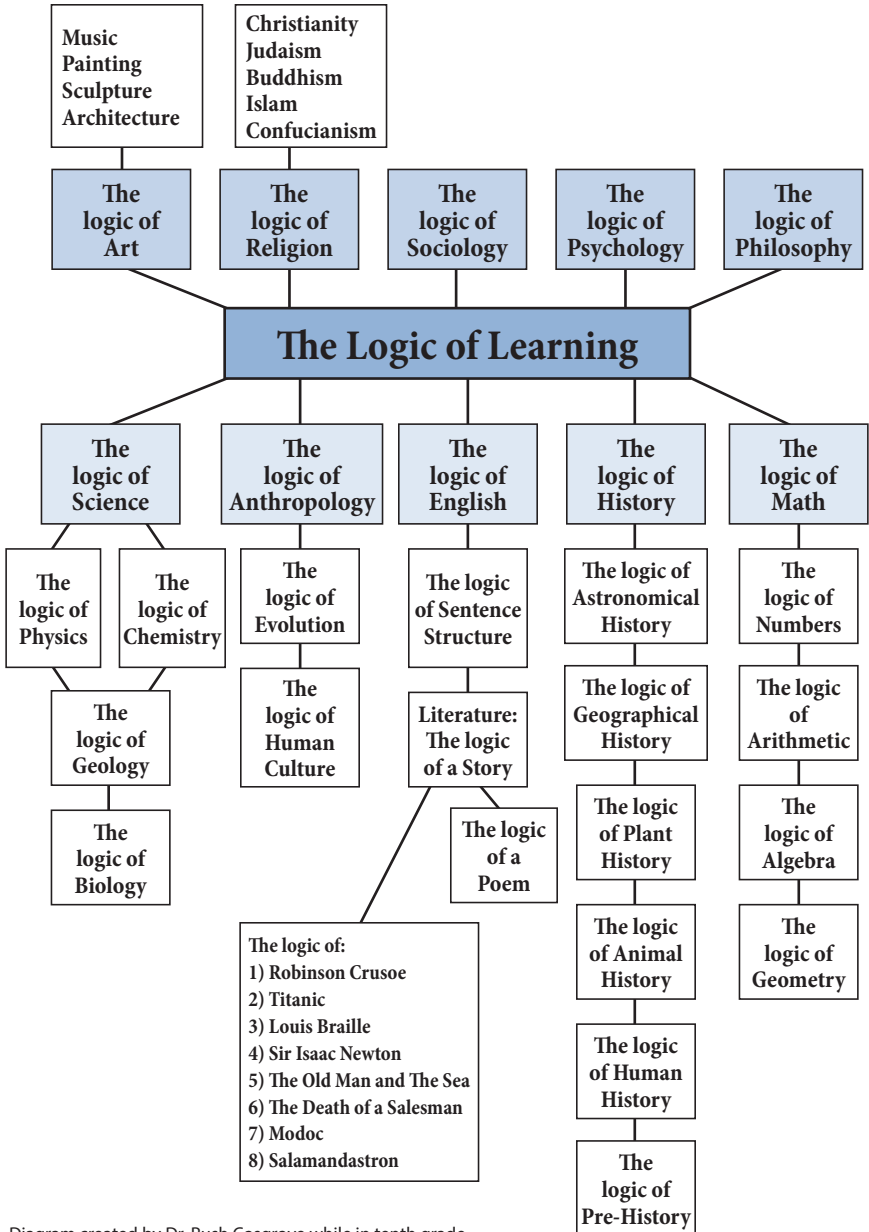
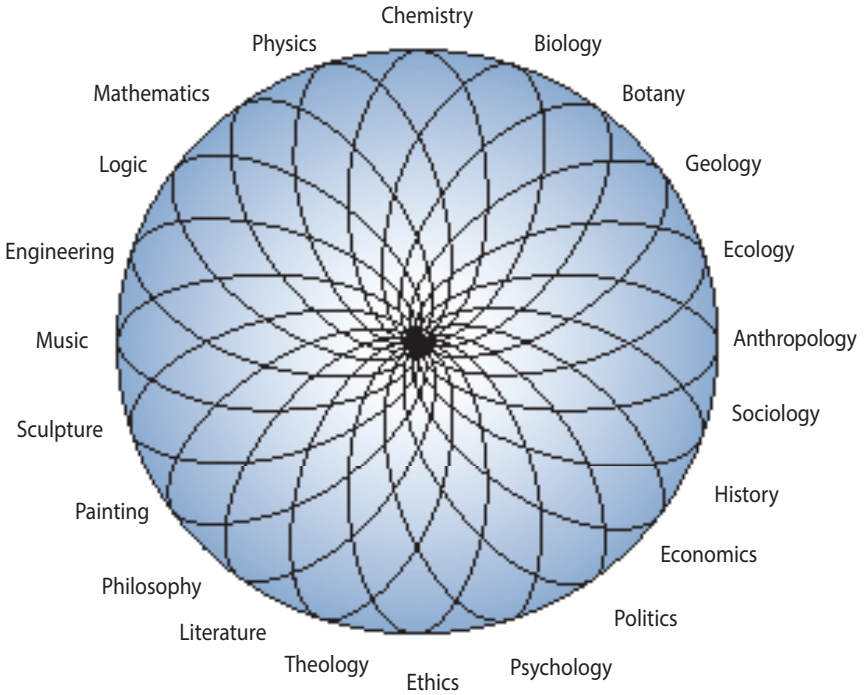


Diagram created by Dr. Rush Cosgrove while in tenth grade.

## Faculty-Generated Map of Knowledge

### Mathematics and Quantitative Disciplines

### Physical and Life Sciences



### Arts and Humanities

### Social Disciplines

This diagram was adapted from a diagram created by John Trapasso.

be open to it as much as possible. And even if I don't agree fully with the author's view, I appropriate important ideas whenever possible. I take command of the ideas that I think are worthwhile rather than dismissing all the ideas simply because I don't completely agree with the author's view.

### **Engaging a Text**

The reflective mind interacts with the author's thinking by actively and deliberately reconstructing it. It does this through a process of inner dialogue with the sentences of the text, assessing each sentence for its intelligibility and questioning in a disciplined way:

- Can I summarize the meaning of this text in my own words?
- Can I give examples from my own experience of what the text is saying?
- Can I generate metaphors and diagrams to illustrate what the text is saying?
- What is clear to me, and what do I need clarified?
- Can I connect the core ideas in this text to other core ideas I understand?

### **Books Are Teachers**

Every book we read is a potential teacher. Reading is a systematic process for learning the essential meanings of that teacher. When we become good readers, we can learn the essential meanings of an almost unlimited number of teachers whose teachings live on, ever available, in the books they have written. When we take the core ideas of those teachings into our minds through careful reading, we can productively use them in our lives.

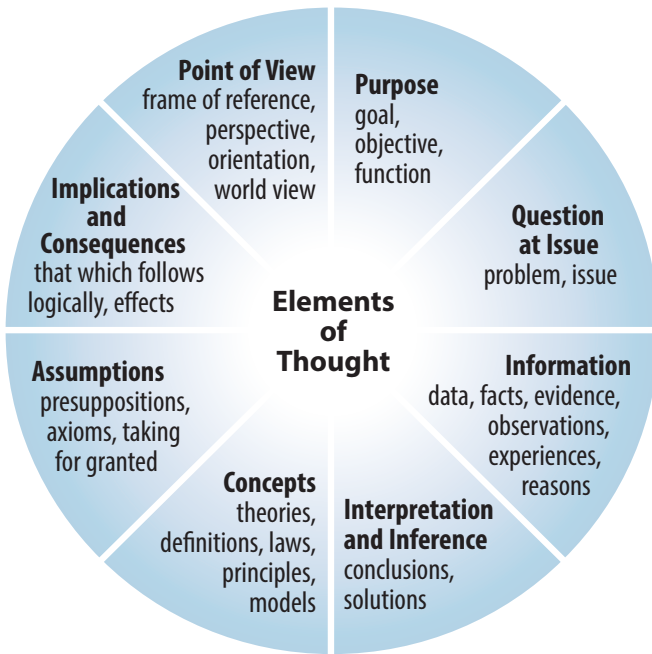
### **Reading Minds**

You have a mind. But do you know how your mind operates? Are you aware of your prejudices and preconceptions? Are you aware of the extent to which your thinking mirrors the thinking of those around you? Are you aware of the extent to which your thinking has been influenced by that of your culture? To what extent can you step outside your day-to-day mindset and into the mindset of those who think differently from you? Are you able to imagine being wrong in some of your beliefs? What criteria would you use to evaluate your personal beliefs? Are you aware of how to upgrade the quality of your own beliefs?

In reading the work of others, you enter their minds. In coming to terms with the mind of another, you can come to better discover your own mind — both its strengths and its weaknesses. To read your own mind, you must learn how to do second-order thinking — how to think about your thinking, from outside of it, while you are thinking. But how do you get outside your thinking?

To do this, you must recognize that there are eight basic structures in all thinking. Whenever we think, we think for a purpose, within a point of view, based on assumptions that lead to implications and consequences. We use concepts, ideas, and theories to interpret data, facts, and experiences in order to answer questions, solve problems, and resolve issues.





### Thinking:

- has a purpose
- raises questions
- uses information
- utilizes concepts
- is based on assumptions
- generates implications
- embodies a point of view

When we come to understand these eight basic elements, we have powerful intellectual tools that enable us to think better. We understand that whenever we reason about anything whatsoever, these parts of thinking are inherent in our mind's operations.

Thus when you read, you are reasoning through the text. You are reading for a purpose, using concepts—or ideas—and assumptions of your own. You are making inferences and thinking within a personal point of view. At the same time, the text you are reading is the product of someone else's reasoning. You therefore recognize that embedded in the text is the author's purpose, question, assumptions, concepts, and so forth. The better you are

at understanding your own reasoning within your own perspective, the better you can understand the reasoning of others. The better you understand someone else's logic, the better you understand your own.

When you can effectively move back and forth between what you are reading and what you are thinking, you bring what you think to bear upon what you read and what you read to bear upon what you think. You are able to change your thinking when the logic of what you read is an improvement on what you think, and you are able to withhold accepting new ideas when you cannot reconcile them with your own. You realize that you may be wrong in some of your beliefs.

### **The Work of Reading**

Reading is a form of intellectual work. And intellectual work requires willingness to persevere through difficulties. But perhaps even more important, intellectual work requires understanding what such work entails. This is where most students fall short. Consider the challenge of analyzing, evaluating, and repairing an automobile engine. The biggest challenge is in knowing how to do what needs to be done: how to use the tools of auto mechanics in taking the engine apart, and how to run tests on specific systems in it. Learning this requires learning how an automobile engine functions.

No one would expect to know how to repair an automobile engine without training that involves both theory and practice. If you learn to “read” without understanding what good reading involves, you learn to read poorly. That is why reading is a fundamentally passive activity for many students. It is as if their theory of reading was something like this: “You let your eye move from left to right, scanning one line at a time, until somehow, in some inexplicable way, meaning automatically and effortlessly happens in the mind.”

### **Five Levels of Close Reading**

To get beyond this unproductive view of reading, we must recognize that the work of close reading consists of mindfully extracting and internalizing the important meanings implicit in a text. It is a highly constructive activity. The reflective mind works its way into the mind of an author through intellectual discipline. The foundation for this discipline is close reading, of which there are a number of levels or “degrees.” Here we highlight five levels (or degrees). The reflective reader does not always use all of them, but chooses from among them depending on the purpose for reading.

### First Level: Paraphrasing

#### Paraphrasing the Text Sentence by Sentence

State in your own words the meaning of each sentence as you read. See paraphrase samples in Appendix A, p. 53.

### Second Level: Explicating

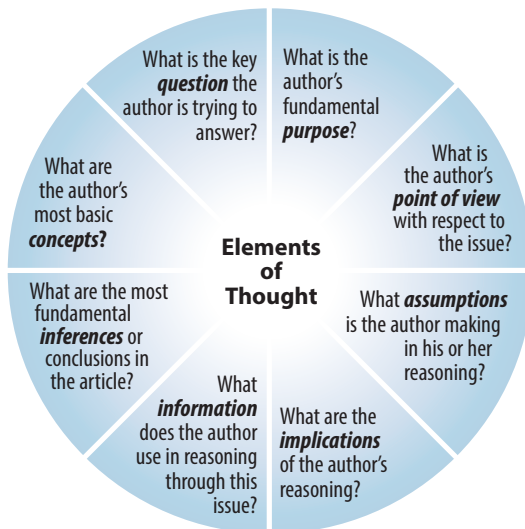
#### Explicating the Thesis of a Paragraph

1. State the main point of the paragraph in one or two sentences.
2. Elaborate on what you have paraphrased (“In other words,...”).
3. Give examples of the meaning by tying it to concrete situations in the real world. (For example,...)
4. Generate metaphors, analogies, pictures, or diagrams of the basic thesis to connect it to other meanings you already understand.

### Third Level: Analyzing

#### Analyzing the Logic of What We Are Reading

Anytime you read, you are reading the product of an author’s reasoning. You can use your understanding of the elements of reasoning, therefore, to bring your reading to a higher level. You can do this by asking the following questions (you may ask these questions in any order you want):



Use the template in Appendix B, *Analyzing the Logic of an Article, Essay, or Chapter*, to figure out the logic of an author’s reasoning.

### **Fourth Level: Evaluating** **Assessing the Logic of What We Are Reading**

Every written piece is not of the same quality. We assess what we read by applying intellectual standards to it—standards such as *clarity*, *precision*, *accuracy*, *relevance*, *significance*, *depth*, *breadth*, *logic*, and *fairness*. Some authors adhere to some standards while violating others. For example, an author might be *clear* in stating his or her position, while at the same time using information that is not *accurate*. An author might use *relevant* information, but fail to think through the complexities of the issue (that is, fail to achieve *depth*). An author's argument might be *logical* but not *significant*. As readers, then, we need to become adept at assessing the quality of an author's reasoning. We do this *only after* we can accurately state in our own words an author's meaning.

To assess an author's work, answer the following questions:

- Does the author *clearly* state his or her meaning, or is the text vague, confused, or muddled in some way?
- Is the author *accurate* in what he or she claims?
- Is the author sufficiently *precise* in providing details and specifics when they are relevant?
- Does the author introduce *irrelevant* material, thereby wandering from his/her purpose?
- Does the author take us into the important *complexities* inherent in the subject, or is the writing *superficial*?
- Does the author consider other *relevant* points of view, or is the writing overly narrow in its perspective?
- Is the text internally *consistent*, or does the text contain unexplained contradictions?
- Is the text *significant*, or is the subject dealt with in a trivial manner?
- Does the author display *fairness*, or does the author take a one-sided, narrow approach?

### **Fifth Level: Role-Playing** **Speaking In the Voice of an Author**

Role-playing an author is, in one way, the ultimate test of understanding. When we role-play, in essence we say: "Look, I will enter the mind of the author and speak as if I were the author. I will discuss any questions you may have about the text by adopting the voice of the author, and will answer your questions as I think the author would. I will speak in the first person singular. I will be like an actor playing the part of Hamlet. I will try to be the author fully and truly for the purpose of this exercise."

To role-play an author, you need a partner who has read the text and is willing to ask you important questions about it. Responding to questions forces you to think within the author's logic. Practicing talking within the voice of an author is a good way to get a personal sense of whether we have really absorbed the core meanings of a text.

## Structural Reading

Structural reading is a form of close reading applied to the overall structure of an extended text (usually a book). We focus on what we can learn about the book from its title, preface, introduction, and table of contents. Structural reading has two main uses. First, it enables us to evaluate a book to determine whether we want to spend the time to read it carefully. Second, it provides an overview to use as scaffolding in reading the text. If we can get a basic idea of what a book is driving at before we read it in detail, we are much better able to make sense of the parts of it as we read them paragraph by paragraph. Knowledge of a whole helps us understand all of its parts. Knowledge of a part helps us better understand the whole (which contains the parts).

To read structurally, ask these questions:

- **What does the title tell me about this book?**
- **What is the main idea in the book?** (You should be able to figure this out from skimming the introduction, preface, and first chapter.)
- **What are the parts of the whole, and how does the book deal with those parts?** (Again, this may be found in an overview in the introduction, preface, first chapter, and/or table of contents.)
- **In the light of my structural reading, what questions would I pursue during close reading?**

## How to Read a Sentence

Reading a sentence consists, first of all, in finding a way to state what the sentence says so we can think the thought the sentence expresses. Further ways to make the meaning of a sentence clear are: elaborating the sentence, finding an example, and illustrating its meaning.

Finding key sentences means finding the sentences that are the driving force within a book. Structural reading is one way by which we locate key paragraphs and boil them down to key sentences, and thence to key ideas and key questions.

An important part of reading with discipline is to connect sentences to the broader context within which they are located, to see how they fit within the written piece. For every sentence you read, you might ask:

- **How does this sentence connect with the other sentences in the text?**
- **How does this sentence relate to the organizing idea of this text as a whole?**

Always read sentences in relationship to other sentences, connecting each sentence with the purpose of the written piece. Taking a sentence out of context can pose problems, because sentences read in isolation from the sentences that precede or follow them often overstate a point. The sentences that precede or follow usually clarify the author's true meaning, or bring it in line with supporting facts. Read a text charitably and generously. Look for qualifications of points that otherwise might seem false or overstated.

## How to Read a Paragraph

Carefully reading a paragraph involves one or more of the tools discussed under Close Reading. These tools help us find the idea or question that is the driving force within the paragraph. Finding key paragraphs consists of finding the ideas or questions that are the driving force within the book. Structural reading, you will remember, is an important means by which we locate key paragraphs.

All paragraphs within a written piece should connect to one another so we can see logical connections between ideas. All ideas should form a system of meanings. As you move from paragraph to paragraph, ask:

- What is the most important idea in this paragraph?
- How do the ideas in this paragraph relate to the ideas in previous paragraphs?
- How are the important ideas in the text connected?

Look for paragraphs that focus on significant ideas or questions. Connect those ideas, when possible, to situations and experiences that are meaningful in your life. To actively connect ideas to life situations, ask:

- How can I relate this idea to something I already understand?
- Is there an important idea here that I can use in my thinking?
- Have I ever experienced a situation that sheds light on this idea?

## How to Read a Textbook

The first and most important insight necessary for successfully reading a textbook is that all textbooks focus on “systems” which, when internalized, can help us reason through a specific set of problems. They focus on a special way of thinking about a special set of things. To elaborate, history textbooks teach a special way of thinking about events in the past. Biology textbooks teach a special way of thinking about living things. Mathematics textbooks teach a special way of thinking about the numbers, shapes, and figures. Physics textbooks teach a special way of thinking about mass and energy and their interrelations. The same is true for all other textbooks.

Thus, there is no way to learn mathematics from a math textbook without learning how to figure out correct answers to mathematical questions and problems. There is no way to learn history from a history textbook without learning how to figure out correct or reasonable answers to historical questions and problems. There is no way to learn biology from a biology textbook without learning how to figure out answers to biological questions and problems. Any subject can therefore be understood as a system of figuring out correct or reasonable answers to a certain set of questions. We study chemistry to understand chemicals and how they interact (to answer questions about chemicals). We study psychology to figure out human behavior (to answer questions about certain human problems). All subjects can be understood in this way. All textbooks can be read in this way.

Most textbooks begin with an introductory chapter or preface that introduces us to the field of study: What is biology? What is physics? What is history? It is important for us to

do a close reading of this opening chapter in order to acquire, from the very beginning, an insight into the most basic and fundamental concepts in the field.

Once we have a basic idea of the whole of a subject from the introductory chapter, we should be able to do some thinking within the system. Thus, with a basic idea of biology, we should be able to do some simple biological thinking. We should be able to ask some basic biological questions and identify some relevant biological information. This is crucial to success in reading the remainder of the textbook, because if we do not have a clear concept of the whole, we will not be able to relate the parts (covered by the other chapters) to that whole.

Our reading strategy should not be whole, part, part, part, part, part...but, rather, whole, part, whole, part, whole, part. We first ground ourselves in a basic (though introductory) idea of the whole. We then relate each part (each subsequent chapter) to that whole. We understand the whole through integrating the parts into it. We use the whole as our tool of synthesis. We use our knowledge of the parts as a tool of analysis.

For examples of the various levels of close reading, follow the guidelines under the Close Reading section. For the third level of close reading of a textbook, use the template in Appendix C: The Logic of a Textbook. Appendix D provides an example of the overall logic of ecology that should result from a “third-level close reading” of any foundational ecology textbook.

### **How to Read a Newspaper (for National and International News)**

To become adept at reading the news, you first must understand that every society and culture has a unique worldview. This colors what they see and how they see it. News media in the cultures of the world reflect the worldview of the culture they write for. Suppose you have two persons reporting on the events of your life — your best friend and your worst enemy. Your best friend would highlight the positive things about you; your worst enemy would highlight the negative things about you. Both would think they were simply telling the truth.

If you understand this, you can apply that understanding to how the news is constructed by every country in the world. Within any country, the news media highlight what is positive about the country; its enemies' news media highlight what is negative about it. As a critical reader of the news, you must make adjustments for both of these biases. So if you are a Frenchman in France reading French newspapers, you must read the fine print to find out the negative things about France that are being suppressed or buried. If you are reading a newspaper from a country that considers France its enemy, you must, in a parallel way, read to correct for its one-sidedness (its predictable negativity toward France).

At present, the overwhelming majority of people in the world—untrained in critical reading—are at the mercy of the news media in their own country. To learn how to read

the news critically, you can begin with our guide entitled *How to Detect Media Bias & Propaganda*. It focuses on how to:

- interpret events from multiple perspectives.
- find multiple sources of thought and information, not simply those of the mass media.
- identify the viewpoints embedded in news stories.
- mentally re-write (reconstruct) news stories through awareness of how stories are told from multiple perspectives.
- assess news stories for their clarity, accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, and significance.
- identify contradictions and inconsistencies in the news (often in the same story).
- identify the agenda and interests served by a story.
- identify the facts covered, and the facts ignored, in a news story.
- identify the points of view systematically presented in a favorable light, as well as those presented in an unfavorable light.

These are some of the skills that critical readers of the news develop. To take command of the way the mass media influence your thinking about the world, you must learn how to see through their biases and appreciate dissenting as well as mainstream points of view. Only then can you come to well-reasoned conclusions using a balanced approach. At present, few people have developed the skills to do this.

### **How to Read an Editorial**

To become adept at reading editorials, you must first understand that the goal of the editorial writer is to make a brief case for one side of a controversial issue. His or her goal is not to consider all sides, or to do what a writer of a research paper or report is expected to do. Most people read editorials in the following way. If writers are defending what they believe, they praise the editorial. If writers are criticizing what they believe, they criticize the editorial. Therefore, they are unable to gain insights from people with whom they disagree. The fact is that most people are rigid in their thinking and largely closed-minded. There are many points of view into which they cannot enter. There are many ways to look at the world that they never examine or appreciate.

By contrast, critical readers recognize that they have been wrong in the past and may be wrong now. They recognize what they would like to believe, while at the same time realizing that they may be prejudiced by that very desire. It is in this spirit of open-mindedness that we should learn to read editorials — especially the ones to which we are least sympathetic. We must learn how to step outside of our own point of view and enter points of view with which we are unfamiliar.

Of course, we should not assume that the editorials in our own culture's newspapers provide us with a full range of viewpoints. What we can expect is merely that these newspapers provide us with the range of views held by the mainstream readers within the society. The goal of a newspaper is not to educate readers concerning international and



dissenting points of view, but rather to make money. And a newspaper makes money only when it caters to the beliefs and preconceptions of its readers. Thus, newspapers rarely present radically dissenting perspectives, and when they do, they emphasize that these are merely opinions.

Critical readers read all editorials with equal sympathy. They read to discover and digest a wide range of viewpoints, especially those that tend to be ignored in the mainstream of the culture. To enhance their breadth of vision while avoiding ethnocentrism and sociocentrism, critical readers search out dissenting media sources.

### **Taking Ownership of What You Read: Mark it Up**

When you were a student in elementary school, you probably were taught never to write in your books, as other students would be using the book after you. This situation is altered when you own a book and are reading a challenging work of substance. Close reading requires a) that we interact with the text by making specific decisions about meanings in the text, b) that we write the ideas we are reading as we read, and c) that we connect important ideas to ones we already understand and use.

One of the best ways to do this is by inserting markings in books as you read them — highlighting key ideas, questions, facts, assumptions, implications, points of view, doubts, and wonderings. You can do this in many ways, but the best ways are those you develop for yourself. Here are some ideas you might find useful in developing your own system of markings. Start with just a couple of these markings and add more when you are ready. See two examples of how one might “mark up” a text while reading (Appendix D).

1. **Circle important concepts and underline their definitions:** As you read, circle the foundational ideas; underline the definitions the author is giving those ideas. Then draw a line between the two so you remember they are connected. (The foundational ideas are those that explain most or many of the other ideas. Make free use of a good dictionary if a word is not clear.)
2. **Make exclamation marks (in the margins) beside important conclusions:** You might use one exclamation mark for an important conclusion, two for an even more important one, and three for a crucial one (!, !!, !!!).
3. **Put a question mark in the margin whenever you don't understand something:** As you read, routinely ask yourself: do I understand what the author is saying? Whenever you don't, write your question in the margin, or just put a question mark there. Later come back to your questions and see if you can answer them, having read further.
4. **Note important problems or issues:** Usually each chapter in a book has an underlying key problem or issue. Mark these with an abbreviation such as prob.
5. **Note important information, data, or evidence:** When you come across information the author is using to support his or her conclusions, circle it and note it in the margin as info, data, or evidence.

6. **Record in the margin the author's point of view when you notice it:** Use the abbreviation POV.
7. **Record in the margin the author's important assumptions as you find them. Also note questionable assumptions by adding a question mark:** Use the abbreviation assump.
8. **Record in the margin the most important implications of the author's reasoning when you notice them:** Use the abbreviation implic.
9. **Formulate ideas of your own as they occur to you:** You may write these ideas in the margin, on the extra pages at the back of the book, or at the end of chapters. The more you write ideas as they occur to you, the clearer you will be about your own thinking in relation to that of the author. Of course, be careful not to disagree with an author until you are sure that you thoroughly understand him or her.
10. **Diagram important concepts and how they are connected:** As you read, you want to formulate a sense of the whole. One good way to do this is by drawing diagrams that show interrelationships between concepts. Use the pages at the front or back of the book, or in a notebook if your drawings become elaborate and you need more space.

### Marking and Abbreviations

<b>Circle around word or phrase</b>	foundational or other important concept
<b>key concept</b>	an essential idea
<b>key Q</b>	key question guiding the author's reasoning
<b>infer</b>	key inference the author is making
<b>I, !!, or !!!</b>	important idea or inference
<b>prob or issue</b>	a key problem or issue the author is addressing
<b>info, data, or evidence</b>	key information, data, evidence supporting inference/argument
<b>POV</b>	key point of view
<b>Assump</b>	an important assumption embedded in the reasoning
<b>Implic</b>	key implications or consequences
<b>notes in margin or on extra pages</b>	reader's thoughts being recorded; connections to ideas beyond the immediate text
<b>diagrams</b>	drawing by the reader to show interrelationships between important ideas
<b>highlighting text</b>	use yellow highlighter to illuminate key ideas

## **Reading to Learn**

To learn well, one must read well. It is far more important to read a few things well than to read many things badly. Among the things we should read well are substantive texts — texts containing important ideas, texts that ground our thinking in powerful ideas. As we have said, it is quite possible to educate oneself entirely through reading. This can be done if one has the intellectual skills to work through complex written material, enter conflicting viewpoints, internalize important ideas, and apply those ideas to one's life.

Alternatively, one cannot be an educated person without consistently learning through reading. Why? Because education is a life-long process that only begins in school. Without continually integrating new ideas with the ones already established in our thinking, old ideas become stagnant and rigid.

## **Reading to Understand Systems of Thought**

Reading with discipline means reading to understand systems of thought. Understanding systems of thought means taking command of the structures that are the basis of all thought. This is most obvious in what we have explained as the ingredients of the third level of close reading: reading for purposes and goals; for questions, problems, and issues; for information and data; for concepts, theories, and ideas; for interpretations and conclusions; for assumptions; for implications and consequences; for points of view. The ability to read in these disciplined ways gives power and command to your reading. You do not simply read; you construct systems of thought as you read.

## **Reading Within Disciplines**

To read within disciplines, you must recognize that all disciplines (subjects that can be studied) are, in fact, systems of thought. Indeed, often they are systems of systems. Thus, scientific thinking forms a large-scale system of thought (which contrasts with other systems, such as ethical thinking). But science as a large-scale system also contains sub-systems within it (physics, chemistry, biology, physiology, and so forth). Science, therefore, is a system of systems.

But unlike science, in which there is agreement on the most basic principles guiding scientific thinking, some systems within a given discipline are in conflict with each other. For example, philosophy, psychology, and economics contain multiple conflicting schools of thought.

To be an effective reader within disciplines, you must learn to identify, for any given subject, whether it is best understood as a system of supporting systems (such as math and science) or a system of conflicting systems (such as philosophy, psychology, and economics). If you are within a system-harmonious field, your task is to master the systems and come to see how they support each other. If you are within a system-conflicting field, your task is to master the systems by exploring how they conflict with each other. Of course, in seeing how conflicting systems exclude each other, you would also discover how they overlap. Conflict between systems of thought is rarely, if ever, total and absolute. You will find conflicting systems in all disciplines in which there are competing schools of thought.

## **The Art of Close Reading**

The remaining part of this Guide consists in excerpts from a series of important texts. All of

the texts contain ideas well worth a careful reading. We will exemplify only the first four levels of reading. The fifth level, role-playing, involves an oral performance. To model role-playing, we would have to construct an imaginary dialogue between the author of one or more of the featured texts and a hypothetical questioner. We leave this possibility to you as the reader.

We do not provide samples of the first four levels of close reading for every excerpt. What we do provide in all cases is the foundation of close reading — namely, a *first reading*. A *first reading* begins with your translation of an author's wording into your own alternative wording. In other words, you put the words and thoughts of the author into your words. Your paraphrase is successful only if your words capture the essential meaning of the original. A *first reading* is successful if the reformulation of the text it represents opens up, or at least *begins* to open up, the meaning of the original.

Hence, if we read this phrase: "Democracy is rule by the people," our paraphrase might read, "A country is democratic only insofar as all the people in the country have an equal amount of power and potential influence in the political process." The paraphrase opens up the text because it points us to possible problems in assessing a country for the degree to which it is democratic. For example, "Does it restrict the influence of the wealthy so they cannot use their wealth to exercise disproportionate influence in the decision-making of the government?"

For a *second reading* of a paragraph, we suggest that you state, elaborate, exemplify, and illustrate the **thesis of the paragraph**.

In a *third reading*, we suggest that you identify the author's purpose, and then state:

- the most important question, problem, or issue in the paragraph
- the most significant information or data in the paragraph
- the most basic conclusion in the paragraph
- the most basic concepts, theories, or ideas in the paragraph
- the most fundamental assumptions of the paragraph
- the most significant implications of the paragraph
- the point of view in the paragraph

In a *fourth reading*, we suggest that you evaluate or assess the text from the viewpoint of nine basic intellectual standards: clarity, accuracy, precision, depth, breadth, relevance, significance, logic, and fairness.

In the excerpts that follow, each text is presented twice—first *without* our interpretation, second, *with* our interpretation. We suggest that you complete your paraphrase before you look at our paraphrase (which follows). View our interpretations not as the *right answers*, but as reasonable interpretations of the passages. Keep in mind that there is always more than one way to accurately paraphrase a sentence.

We recommend that you look up any words in a dictionary or thesaurus when you are unsure how to express a given phrase or sentence in your own words. Do not rush through these interpretations. Rather, work at every phrase until you are satisfied that you have captured the essential meaning of it as precisely as you can. The art of paraphrasing is a cornerstone in close reading.

## The Practice: Exercises in Close Reading

**Directions:** For each reading that follows, test your grasp of the passages by putting them into your own words. Compare your reading with the sample interpretation that follows the First Reading: Paraphrasing sections. See paraphrase samples in Appendix A, p. 53 if the idea of paraphrasing is not yet clear to you.

### **The Declaration of Independence**

**Background Information:** To make sense of these paragraphs from the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, one must understand that it is part of a political manifesto adopted by the Continental Congress proclaiming the independence of the 13 British colonies in America from Great Britain.

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, having its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations pursuing invariable the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their Future security.

#### **First Level: Paraphrasing**

*When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another...*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*...and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's god entitle them...*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*...a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it...*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*...and to institute new Government, having its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes...*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*...and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*But when a long train of abuses and usurpations pursuing invariable the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their Future security.*

**PARAPHRASE:**

## First Level: Sample Paraphrase (Interpretation)

*When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another...*

**PARAPHRASE:** “Political” arrangements (forms of government) are not necessarily permanent. It is important sometimes to abolish them and set up new arrangements. When this is true, one group of people have to separate themselves from the group to which they were formerly joined.

*...and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's god entitle them...*

**PARAPHRASE:** No government should dominate any other government, but all should have the same status (be “separate and equal”). The act of a people declaring themselves independent of other peoples (with whom they were formerly connected) is a perfectly natural act based on “the laws of nature.” Therefore the thirteen states are “entitled” by natural law to revolt and declare themselves “separate [from] and equal” to all other countries of the world.

*...a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.*

**PARAPHRASE:** But when a people decide to break away from another people and establish their own nation, they should — out of respect for the views of other peoples in the world — lay out the reasons that have led them to make their revolutionary decision.

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.*

**PARAPHRASE:** There are some truths so obvious that everyone should recognize their truth simply by thinking them through. This includes the truth that, all things being equal, every person should be accorded the same basic rights. These rights include the right to not be hurt, harmed, or killed; the right to as much freedom (of thought, of movement, of choice of associates, of belief) as is possible; and the right to live their lives as they please.

*That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.*

**PARAPHRASE:** The main reason for having a government is to protect our rights to equality, life, liberty, and our own preferred way of living. Governments should have only the power we freely give them to protect our rights. Governments should not rule us; we should rule them.

*That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it...*

**PARAPHRASE:** Whenever any government stops protecting our rights (to equality, life, liberty, and our own preferred way of living), we have a right to change that government or end it altogether; for people have an inherent right to revolt against—and overthrow—any government that fails to enhance our quality of life, our equality, our freedom, and our preferred ways of living. If government is really doing its job, we should experience maximum freedom in our lives and a minimum of restrictions. In a well-governed country, laws should be kept to an absolute minimum.

*...and to institute new Government, having its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.*

**PARAPHRASE:** If we do overthrow a government that fails to uphold the rights of the people, we should start a new government that is concerned with the safety and happiness of the people.

*Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes...*

**PARAPHRASE:** If we are practical, discreet, and have good judgment, we will not overthrow a government except for important and enduring reasons.

*...and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.*

**PARAPHRASE:** And, in fact, the whole of human history shows us that people are much more apt to suffer their rights being abused than to revolt against such abuse.

*But when a long train of abuses and usurpations pursuing invariable the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their Future security.*

**PARAPHRASE:** When a government displays a long-standing disregard for the human rights of its own citizens, it is not only the right but also the obligation of such citizens to revolt against the government, and to set up a new one that upholds its natural rights.

## Second Level: Thesis of the Declaration

**Directions:** Complete the following four tasks: 1) State the thesis of the passage in your own words. 2) Elaborate on the thesis. 3) Give one or more examples of the thesis. 4) Illustrate the thesis with a metaphor or analogy.



## Statement of Thesis

All peoples in the world have a right to revolt against their government, and establish a new government, when their human rights are systematically violated.

## Elaboration of Thesis

Periodically, people are governed in such a way as to oppress or exploit them and violate their rights as humans. When that occurs, the people so oppressed have a right to set up their own country and government.

## Exemplification of Thesis

This situation occurred in France, leading to the French revolution; in America, leading to the American revolution; in Russia, leading to the Russian revolution.

## Illustration of Thesis

A political revolution is like a divorce within a family, in which part of the family separates itself from another part and they go their separate ways. Each part becomes a family of its own, with a separate life. Divorces, like revolutions, usually occur when one or more persons have a long-standing grievance that they believe will never be redressed in the present family structure. Like political revolutions, divorces in the family sometimes involve violence.

## Third Level: Analyzing the Logic of the *Declaration*

**Directions:** Analyze the text. Identify the author's purpose and then state:

- the most important question, problem, or issue in the text
- the most significant information or data
- the most basic conclusion
- the most basic concepts, theories, or ideas
- the most fundamental assumptions
- the most significant implications
- the point of view

See Appendix B for detailed directions.

1. **The authors' purpose:** to enunciate human rights, and their violation, as a justification for the 1776 political revolt of American colonists against Great Britain.
2. **The most important questions, problems, or issues in the text:** Are there universal human rights? Under what conditions are people justified in attempting to overthrow a government? Were the colonists justified in their revolt against Great Britain?
3. **The most significant information or data in the text:** information supporting the view that American colonists were being denied basic rights, and that they were suffering at the hands of the government.
4. **The most basic conclusions of the author:** that the proper function of governments is to protect the universal human rights of citizens so they can live the freest life

possible; that if a government fails to protect the human rights of its citizens, the people have the right to overthrow the government.

5. **The most basic concepts, theories, or ideas used by the author:** human rights, revolution, and the role and duty of government.
6. **The most fundamental assumptions of the author:** that all people have the same basic rights, that all governments have the same basic duties to the people, and that governments should serve people rather than people serving governments.
7. **The most significant implications of the text:** that of setting an example to the world of people enunciating universal human rights, including—and most importantly—the right of revolution.
8. **The author's point of view:** seeing all humans as equal in worth and in human rights; at the same time, seeing all governments as having the obligation to be subservient to people, rather than to dominate them.

### **Fourth Level: Evaluating the *Declaration* Through Intellectual Standards**

**Directions:** Assess the passage from the point of view of nine basic intellectual standards: clarity, accuracy, precision, depth, breadth, relevance, significance, logic, and fairness.

1. **Do the authors say clearly what they mean, or is the text vague, confused, or muddled in some way?** The text is eminently clear, though written in the archaic language of the time.
2. **Are the authors accurate in what they claim?** The standard of accuracy applies most readily to the list of specific grievances that follow, but is not incorporated into the text here. The section of the Declaration we read enunciates ideals, not facts. Most people in government would theoretically accept those ideals while violating them in practice. The U.N. Declaration of Human Rights is a modern amplification of basic human rights. It has been signed by all of the nations in the world, yet the violation of human rights is a reality in virtually every country.
3. **Are the authors sufficiently precise in providing details and specifics (when relevant)?** Like the standard of accuracy, the standard of precision applies most readily to the list of specific grievances that follows the text we read here.
4. **Are the authors true to their purpose or do they wander, thereby introducing irrelevant material?** All of the text seems highly relevant to the central purpose of detailing human rights, and their violation, as a justification for the political revolt of American colonists against Great Britain.
5. **Do the authors take us into the important complexities inherent in the subject, or is the writing superficial?** In a very short text, the Declaration introduces concepts

and ideals that are profoundly important in human life and history. Of course, there are many complexities inherent in the subject that are not discussed.

6. **Do the authors consider other relevant points of view, or is the writing overly narrow in its perspective?** As a political manifesto, it defends universal human rights and hence is broad in its sweep. At the same time, it excludes a “power rules in a hard, cruel world” orientation, which seems to motivate many—if not most—politicians, and seems to underlie most political reality.
7. **Is the text internally consistent, or does it have unexplained contradictions?** The text is highly consistent internally. At the same time, it is inconsistent with a view that would privilege vested interest over the rights of the common people.
8. **Is what the text says significant, or is the subject dealt with in a trivial manner?** This manifesto is one of the most significant documents in human history.
9. **Does the author display fairness, or is the subject dealt with in an unfair manner?** Because the Declaration of Independence defends the basic rights of all humans, it is, by implication, fair.

### Fifth Level: Role Playing

**Directions:** You may now deepen your insight even more by role-playing the principal author of the declaration, Thomas Jefferson. In role-playing Jefferson, find someone to question you about the Declaration. Then respond to the questions as if you were Jefferson. Encourage the person to ask whatever questions occur to him or her. Answer by trying to reconstruct what you think Jefferson might say. Make sure that what you “attribute” to him is implied in some way in the text.

### Civil Disobedience

**Background Information:** This is the opening paragraph of an essay on “Civil Disobedience,” originally written in 1849 by Henry David Thoreau, a well-known figure in nineteenth century American cultural and literary thought.

I heartily accept the motto, — “That government is best which governs least;” and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe, “That government is best which governs not at all;” and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an army of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it.

For this passage we provide a first and second reading. Students should practice marking up these texts before they see the samples (Appendix D).

### First Level: Paraphrasing

*I heartily accept the motto, — “That government is best which governs least;” and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically.*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe, — “That government is best which governs not at all”...*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*...and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient.*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an army of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it.*

**PARAPHRASE:**

### First Level: Sample Paraphrase (Interpretation)

*I heartily accept the motto, — “That government is best which governs least;” and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically.*

**PARAPHRASE:** The most effective form of government is one that establishes the least number of rules, regulations, and laws, so that people are as free as possible to make their own decisions and live in the ways they see fit. The U.S. government is not yet living up to this ideal and I, Thoreau, would like to see the government moving toward that ideal more quickly and more methodically.

*Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe, — “That government is best which governs not at all”...*

**PARAPHRASE:** The ideal form of government is one that places no rules and regulations on people whatsoever.

*...and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.*

**PARAPHRASE:** When people can live rationally—respecting the rights and needs of others as a matter of course, making reasonable decisions in thinking through issues and problems, and rising above the need to be restrained—they will then demand a government that doesn't interfere with their ability to live life as they so choose.

*Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient.*

**PARAPHRASE:** Government, at best, is a necessary evil—a contrivance that is useful in the short run. But most governments typically are not useful and beneficial to people, and all governments sometimes fail to serve the people usefully.

*The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an army of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it.*

**PARAPHRASE:** The problems inherent in established governments are similar to the problems that typically emerge where you have established armies within countries. And the two sets of problems are interrelated, because fixed armies are controlled by fixed governments. When governments are established, they presumably are established to carry out the desires of the people they represent. But they often become dysfunctional, failing to achieve their original purposes and intentions, and are used by the “powers that be” to serve the interests of those who are governing rather than those they should be representing. This often happens before the people even have an opportunity to take advantage of the expressed purposes and goals of the government. In other words, this problem seems almost a natural implication of an established government (given historical examples).

## **Second Level: The Thesis of Civil Disobedience**

### **Clarification of Thesis**

All governments tend to abuse power—to generate laws and to make decisions that unduly restrict people's freedom. Therefore, people are best served by governments that govern as little as possible. When people are able to live without being governed, they will demand to live without government.

### **Elaboration of Thesis**

Though a democratic government is chosen by the people to carry out the will of the people, it is far too easy and common for governmental power to be used for purposes of vested interests rather than for the best interest of the people. When this happens, the rights of the people are subverted. Therefore a minimalist type of government is best. But people can have such a government only when they think well enough to demand it, and

when they can live rationally without unnecessary governance.

### Exemplification of Thesis

We can see this thesis illustrated in the U.S. Mexican War. Though the voters never approved of that war, it was forced on the citizenry by politicians and business people who were greedy for more land, more power, and more profits.

### Illustration of Thesis

Governments abusing power and doing what is in their interest, rather than the interest of the people, is similar to bureaucrats designing regulations to fit their own desires—or the desires of pressure groups—rather than the needs of the people the bureaucracy is supposed to serve.

### Civil Disobedience (Second Excerpt)

**Background Information:** Here is another paragraph from “Civil Disobedience,” written in 1849 by Henry David Thoreau.

Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide what is right and wrong, but conscience?... Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience, to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right... If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go... If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you can consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil: but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine.

For this passage we provide a first and second reading.

### First Level: Paraphrasing

*Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide what is right and wrong, but conscience?...*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience, to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward.*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right...*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go... If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you can consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil...*

**PARAPHRASE:**

*...but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine.*

**PARAPHRASE:**

### **First Level: Sample Paraphrase (Interpretation)**

*Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide what is right and wrong, but conscience?...*

**PARAPHRASE:** Is it possible to be governed such that one can decide for oneself what is right or wrong, based on one's own ethical sense of both, rather than having a government dictate what is right or wrong based on what most people think?

*Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward.*

**PARAPHRASE:** Individual citizens should never, under any circumstances or at any time, give up what they know to be ethically right and instead allow legislators to decide this for them. Why do people have the intellectual ability to figure out what is right and wrong if they are not willing to live in accordance with their sense of what is right? Doing what one deeply judges to be right takes precedence over doing what governments say we should, or must, do.

*It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right...*

**PARAPHRASE:** It is much more important for people to develop a respect for, and understanding of, what is right than to uncritically adhere to laws (which may be unjust). The only thing that people are really obligated to do is what they think is right, not what the law says is right. (Of course, this assumes that people understand ethics, and can distinguish it from cultural norms and values.)

*If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go... If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you can consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil...*

**PARAPHRASE:** Some situations and circumstances are inherently unjust to some people, no matter what is done to reduce injustice within systems. It may be the case,

The Foundation for Critical Thinking  
PO Box 196  
Tomales, CA 94971



### About the Authors:



**Dr. Richard Paul** is a major leader in the international critical thinking movement. He is Director of Research at the Center for Critical Thinking, the Chair of the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking, and author of over 200 articles and seven books on critical thinking. Dr. Paul has given hundreds of workshops on critical thinking and made a series of eight critical thinking video programs for PBS. His views on critical thinking have been canvassed in *New York Times*, *Education Week*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *American Teacher*, *Educational Leadership*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and *Reader's Digest*.



**Dr. Linda Elder** is an educational psychologist who has taught both psychology and critical thinking at the college level. She is the President of the Foundation for Critical Thinking and the Executive Director of the Center for Critical Thinking. Dr. Elder has a special interest in the relation of thought and emotion, as well as the cognitive and affective. She has developed an original theory of the stages of critical thinking development. Dr. Elder has co-authored four books on critical thinking as well as twenty-four Thinkers' Guides. She has presented workshops to more than 20,000 educators.