

# WRT 205: Critical Research

## *Close Reading in preparation for writing*

Sources aren't simply static chunks of material that you pick up and plug into your own text. Research-based writing isn't just about assembling and deploying quotations. It's about working with ideas, and that means a lot of explanation and analysis along the way.

It can be difficult to see through to what scholars are actually doing, which is why we'll spend a good bit of time on this in the next few weeks—analyzing texts to see how they work, and then writing with and around them to see what we can possibly do with them, how we can forward them and our own thinking.

Close reading of potential sources, therefore, is absolutely crucial to your work in any research-writing assignment. Before you can use sources, you need to become conversant with them, to understand what they are, what they say, and what value they have to do.

So how do you do that?—well, you need to attend to both the details of it. Here's how:

- Read actively, pen in hand, brain turned on, asking and answering questions (and writing your responses down!)
- Make sure you have a grasp of *what the text says*
  - summarize (in around one sentence) the author's central argument
  - list the key supporting claims
- Make sure you have a clear sense of the rhetorical situation, of *what the text is*
  - Author (background, area of expertise, qualifications)
  - Audience (who is the target reader? Consider place of publication, writing style, use of jargon, etc.)
  - Purpose (what is the author trying to accomplish?)
  - Context (of the writer and the reader—what's going on in the world around this text?)
  - Exigence (what is the 'spark' for this text? What moves the writer to write?)
- Make sure you consider *how the text works*
  - Level of formality
  - Use of graphics, media, links, and other non-textual elements
  - Use and documentation of research
  - Sentence-level details—word choice, syntax, how (s)he connects the dots
  - As you read, mark what you find interesting and especially what you think is effective (what helps the author achieve his/her objective in the text)

In addition to grasping the specific elements of the text, you also need to have a sense of the Big Picture, so that you can *define* the text to someone else

- Aims—what is the author trying to achieve?
- Methods—how does the author connect examples and ideas, different claims, etc.?
- Materials—what kinds of examples and evidence does the author work with?

All of this depends on getting in the habit of writing as you read. That will help you to differentiate between texts, capture your initial reactions, and begin formulating ideas that will serve as valuable invention work for the next steps in our assignment cycle.