

WORKSHOP # 1

quoted and adapted from "Reading to Write," Nancy Koppelman & Sandy Yanonne

Carpe Books



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"Reading is a complex and painstaking art that is rarely treated as such."

"...lack of attention to reading reinforces a number of counterproductive assumptions that many students develop over years of primary and secondary schooling, many of which are encouraged by the social dynamics therein."

Assumptions:

"Some people just happen to be good readers, and others just aren't.

"If a text is easy to read, you're lucky. If it isn't, you're doomed.

"It's possible to spend a long time reading a book, but still not understand what it is about, why the author wrote it, and why the author thinks its subject is important.

"Books are obstacles to overcome, rather than opportunities to learn.

"The point of reading books is to show your teacher that you have read them and to fulfill the requirements for credit..."

"Reading can be accomplished by rationing, e.g., a 200 page book = 40 pages per day X 5 days."

"These assumptions reflect the conclusions of students who often struggle ineffectively to understand books. They are a world apart from how faculty expect students to read. Faculty expect students to arrive in seminar having struggled effectively to understand the text at hand."

"...faculty member David Marr wrote, 'When I entered college, I was a stranger to close reading (even not-so-close reading)' A chance encounter with a gifted English teacher inspired him to read by treating 'everything as if it were poetry.' Although this was something of a 'curse,' since poetry requires slow, painstaking reading, Marr eventually figured out that '[o]ne reads various kinds of prose texts—fiction philosophy, and historical monographs and the other materials of historical study—in ways peculiar to the study of each. Learning this lesson became, over time, the blessing inside the curse.'

""I know I should be able to understand this book, but I don't. I don't really know what's wrong with me. After all, I know how to read, don't I?"

"...relatively few people are able to pick up a book cold, open it to page one, start reading, and understand it..."

we cannot read well unless we "change our overall orientation to books"

"...books are not dead objects. They are thoughts, and often the most carefully wrought thoughts, from people who wanted to say something important to other people."

"[when we read], we witness and can even become part of [the] ongoing project of interpreting the world."

from Italo Calvino, "Whom Do We Write For? or The Hypothetical Bookshelf, THE USES OF LITERATURE, Harcourt, Brace & company: New York, 1986.

"A book is written so that it can be put aside other books and take its place on a hypothetical bookshelf, expelling certain other volumes from their places or forcing them back into the second row, while demanding that certain others should be brought up to the front.... A writer's work is important to the extent that the ideal bookshelf on which he would like to be placed is still an improbable shelf, containing books that we do not usually put side by side, the juxtaposition of which can produce electric shocks, short circuits."

WORKSHOP # 1

BOOKS

Getting to know books

1. Make a list of the books you have read in the last 10 years (as many as you can).
2. On your list circle those that have been the most important to you personally or intellectually.
3. Pair up with someone near you and share your lists.
4. Choose one of the “important” books (that the other person has not read) on your list to **introduce** to your peer. Introduce it with a mind to inspiring them to read it. What is it like to read? What’s important about it? How does it fit into your life, your thoughts, your imagination? Imagine that the book you’re telling them about is a special friend or a person who has influenced you: discuss your relationship to the book.
Each person should take few minutes to introduce one book.
5. Together make a list of answers to the question: What are books for? Give answers that apply to the few books that you would say have been the MOST important to you. Try to come up with answers that apply to both fiction & non-

THE HYPOTHETICAL BOOKSHELF

1. Join your pair to another pair of students.
2. Examine your list of books from the first activity, and make a short list of books that you have in common.
3. Each student should then come up with one book that “creates sparks” with that list, and explain how and why it does so.

Looking at the 1st book

1. Using our first text of the quarter, *Privilege, Power and Difference*, as a group consider the following questions.
2. Begin with the book’s cover.
 - What are your impressions of the book based on any imagery, graphic design elements on the front/back of the book? How does the book try to sell itself on first impression? You can’t judge a book by its cover, but it’s the book publisher’s job to at least sell it to the right person that way.
 - Read any material on the back. Take a minute to absorb any summaries, critical praise that appears. Again, how is the book sold to you, what is it supposed to do? How will you know if the book does what it sets out to do? Are you the right audience for the book now, or will reading it demand that you attend to ideas, information to which you are unaccustomed? Do you expect to like it?
 - Scan the book’s contents and sections. Don’t read any of the “body” of the book, but take note of section/chapter titles, bibliographies, works cited, appendages, footnotes/endnotes, and other extensions of the main text. These elements all encourage a non-linear reading process that you can begin to imagine.

WRITE: summarize your impressions

- Now read *some* of the introduction, preface, and whatever else precedes the text.

Next scan the introduction to get a sense of the purpose it holds. Does it introduce the point of every section following, does it give background about the author, the subject, the discipline?

- Finally, choose a chapter or section to start with (not necessarily the first). Read the last paragraph or two of the section. Take a moment to digest the ending, formulate a sense of the questions or ideas developed in the section and any questions you need answered to understand the last paragraph. Now go back to the beginning of the chapter. Read the first one-three sentences of every paragraph. Allow yourself to get sucked in here and there if the paragraph demands it but try to keep moving “lightly” over the text.

WRITE/DISCUSS: summarize what you’ve found. Does this reading process seem helpful? How? Why?

“Books appear to us as linear objects.... Yet it is counterproductive to read most nonfiction books starting with page 1. Such books have a careful and purposeful design, and it is useful to understand that design before you actually begin reading. Writers don’t write the pages in order; they go through a halting and creative process of thinking, researching, outlining, drafting.... Books come to have a structure, and to appear as if they were created in linear fashion.” By perceiving some of the book’s imbedded structures and by exploring its sections before we actually turn to page one, we are more prepared to begin absorbing the author’s ideas and intentions.