Different Ways Of Reading For Different Occasions

Restatement, Description, Interpretation

How we choose to read a particular text will depend on the nature of the text and our specific goals at the time. When we assume a factual presentation, we might read for what a text says. When we assume personal bias, we look deeper to interpret underlying meanings and perspectives.

To answer the question, "What issues does the text discuss," we read to see what the essay does. To answer the question, "What concerns underlie the essay's analysis of history," we read to see what the essay means.

As a reader, you must know what you intend to do, and whether or not you have accomplished it. You must adjust how you read to the nature of the reading material, the nature of the reading assignment, and the manner in which you will be held accountable for your reading.

Restatement: Reading What a Text Says

Reading what a text says is concerned with basic comprehension, with simply following the thought of a discussion. We focus on understanding each sentence, sentence by sentence, and on following the thought from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph.

There is no attempt to assess the nature of the discussion and no concern for an overall motive or intent. Reading what a text says is involved with rote learning.

Restatements should avoid the same language as much as possible to avoid plagiarism and to show understanding of the subject matter. Reading what a text says is common under a variety of circumstances:

- when learning the definitions and concepts of a new discipline,
- when there is agreement on the facts of a situation and their interpretation,
- when a text is taken to offer a complete and objective presentation
- when the word of a specific author or source is accepted as authoritative.

Readers simply accept what a text states. When first studying any academic topic, your initial goal is to understand what others have discovered before you. Introductory courses ask students to learn terms, concepts, and data of the particular area of study.

Description: Describing What a Text Does

   This second level of reading is concerned not only with understanding individual remarks, but also with recognizing the structure of a discussion. We examine what a text does to convey ideas. We might read this way to understand how an editorial justifies a particular conclusion, or how a history text supports a particular interpretation of events.

   Here we are concerned with describing the discussion:

- what topics are discussed?
- what examples and evidence are used?
- what conclusions are reached?

   We want to recognize and describe how evidence is organized to reach a final position, rather than simply follow remarks from sentence to sentence. This level of reading looks at broad portions of the text to identify the structure of the discussion as a whole.

   On completion, we cannot only repeat what the text says, but can also describe what the text does. We can identify how evidence is used and how the final points are reached.

Interpretation: Analyzing What a Text Means

   This final level of reading infers an overall meaning. We examine features running throughout the text to see how the discussion shapes our perception of reality. We examine what a text does to convey meaning: how patterns of content and language shape the portrayal of the topic and how relationships between those patterns convey underlying meaning.

   Readers bring to their reading an understanding of what the words mean within the given social and historical context, and an understanding of the remarks within their own framework of what might make sense, or what they might imagine an author to have intended.   Stories present actions; readers infer personalities, motives, and intents. When we go beyond the words, we are reading meaning.

   Readers infer as much, if not more, than they are told. Readers go beyond the literal meaning of the words to find significance and unstated meanings. The reader's eye may scan the page, but the reader's mind ranges up, down, and sideways, piecing together evidence to make sense of the presentation as a whole.