

## Reading and Writing Assignments

Heuristics prompt thinking by means of questions and may be useful to guide your **reading**. A familiar example is the Who? What? When? Where? How? procedure which can be expanded to think about a text as a conversation. Who was the text written for? What background knowledge is assumed? Which parts are difficult and which parts can be skimmed? How does the author try to convince you? How are you different from the intended audience? What does the reading mean to you? asks John C. Bean, in *Engaging Ideas*. He also suggests using sticky notes or writing in the margin when you read. Don't just underline but "write out **why** you wanted to underline it. Why is that passage important? Is it a major new point in the argument? A significant piece of support? A summary of the opposition? A particularly strong or particularly weak point?"

Another set of questions that often work well, adapted from W. Ross Winterowd in *The Contemporary Writer: A Practical Rhetoric* is to view things:

- as an isolated static entity. What are its characteristic features?
- as one among many of a class. How does it differ from others in its class?
- as part of a larger system. How does it fit into larger systems of which it is a part?
- as a process, rather than as a static entity. How is it changing?
- as a system, rather than as an entity. What are the parts and how do they fit together?

Richard Larson's problem solving heuristic for issues-oriented subjects asks:

- What is the problem? Why is the problem indeed a problem?
- What goals are to be accomplished? Which goals have the highest priority?
- What procedures might attain the goals?
- What are the consequences of each possible action (including inaction)?
- How do potential actions compare as potential solutions to the problem?
- Which course of action is best?

### Reading Reaction Papers

In this course you will often be asked to bring a 2-3 page typed reaction to the reading assigned for the day. The paper should demonstrate that you have done the readings and have thought about them carefully, and that you are prepared to discuss their contents. These papers should be your *response* to the reading, not a summary of the content. Go beyond facts and information to focus on the meaning. **Papers should have a topic that expands upon, responds to, and engages the material and gives a you a chance to practice using the heuristics above.**

Your papers might also include comparisons of different parts of the readings, something with which you agree, something with which you disagree, how the reading relates to a personal experience you have had, how the reading relates to other reading in this or another course, or questions about things you don't understand. John Bean says, "Analyze, illustrate it through your own experience, refute it, get mad it, question it, believe it, doubt it, go beyond it."

Try to have a "conversation" with what you read. The reaction papers can be thought of as your contribution to the conversation –"talk back" to the author/s by documenting what you are "saying" in writing. You should also be prepared to speak about the ideas in your papers during class discussion.

Do remember your writing skills: Organized paragraphs with topic sentences, spell checked, and a concluding paragraph of your point at the end of your writing.