

The Thinker's Guide
to

How to Read a Paragraph

The Art of Close Reading

Based on Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools

By Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder

A Companion to:

The Thinker's Guide to How to Write a Paragraph

The Foundation for Critical Thinking

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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 in different situations for different purposes. 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 in internalizing and taking 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

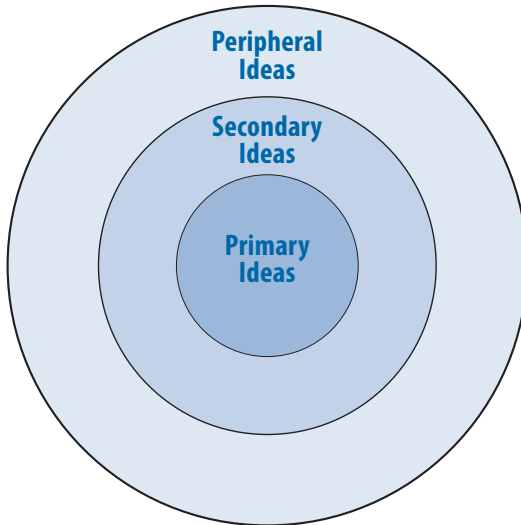
In addition to being clear about our own purpose in reading, we must also be clear about the author's purpose in writing. Both are relevant. Consider the following agendas. Think about what adjustments you would make in your reading given the differing purposes of these writers:

- 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 you conclude 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.



Essential Idea: Closely reading about primary and secondary ideas in an discipline is a key to understanding the discipline.

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 8.

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, 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.

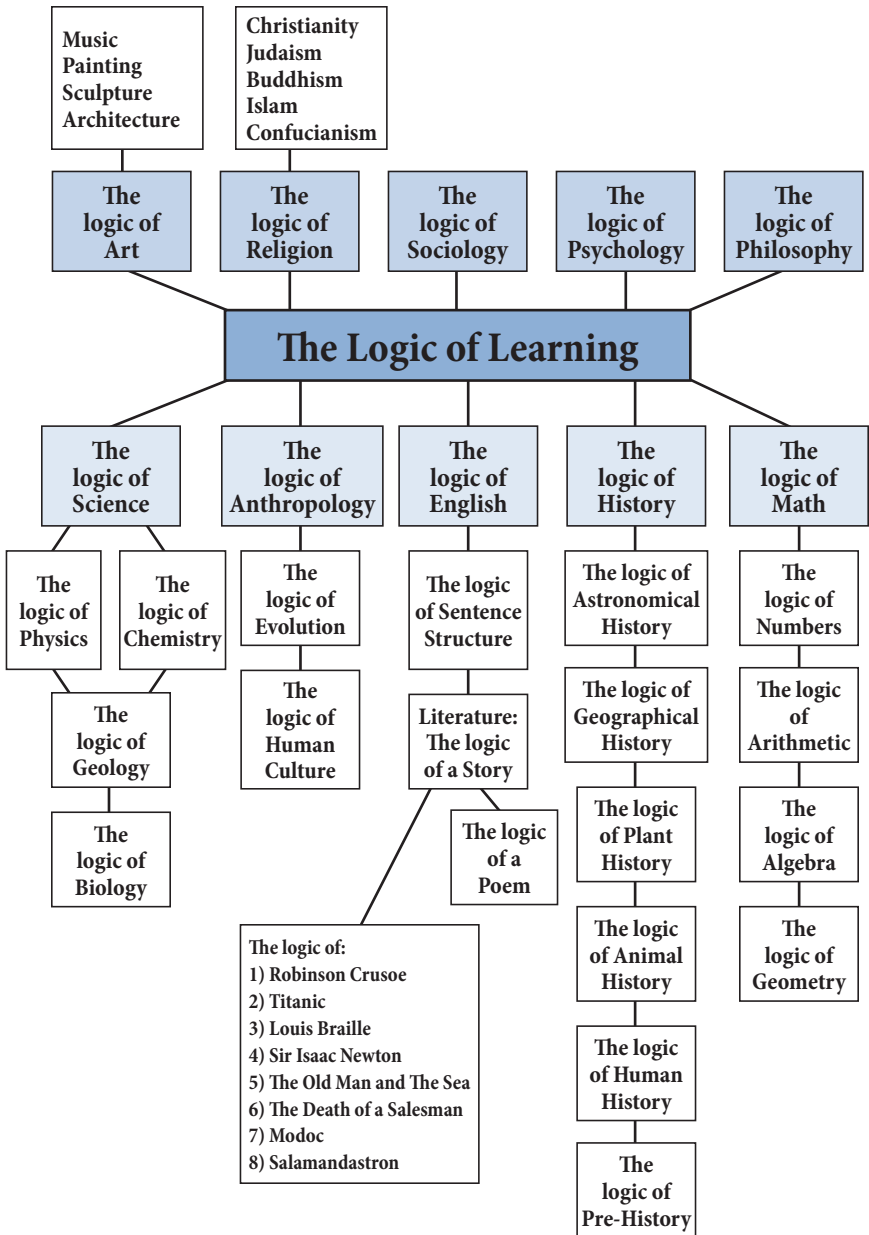
Thinking About Reading While Reading

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 that a thinker can have is the ability to monitor and assess his or her own thinking while processing the thinking of others. In reading, 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

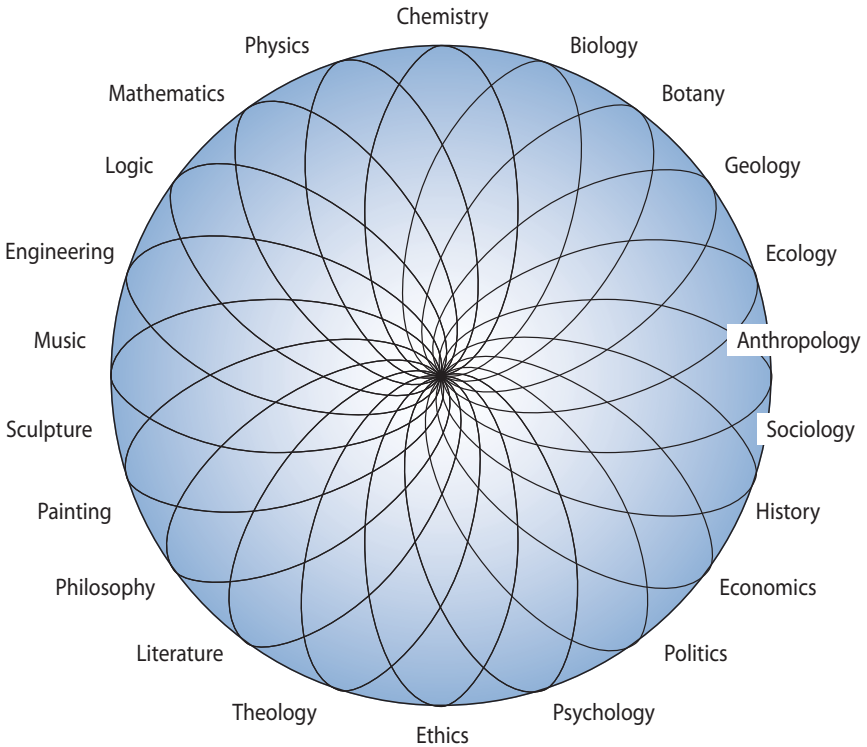
Student-Generated Map of Knowledge



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. In this interaction, the reader's mind reconstructs the author's thinking. 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

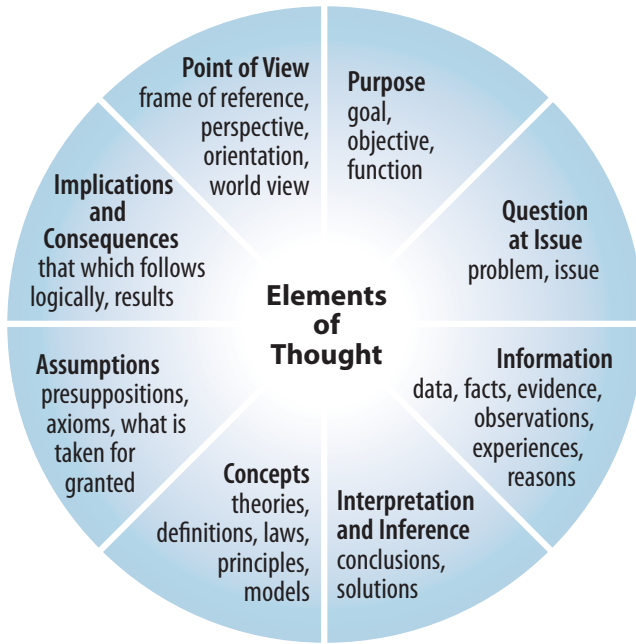
Every book we read is a potential teacher. Reading is a systematic process for learning the essential meanings of that teacher. When we become good readers, we can learn the essential meanings of an unlimited number of teachers whose teachings live on, ever available, in the books they have written. 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 the thinking of the culture in which you have been raised and conditioned? 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 while you are thinking from outside your 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 leading 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
- makes inferences
- is based on assumptions
- generates implications
- embodies a point of view

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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, making inferences, 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, the author's 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. And learning this requires learning how an automobile engine functions, the internal combustion system it represents.

No one would expect to know how to repair an automobile engine without training, involving 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 in 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. There are a number of levels of close reading. Here we highlight five levels (or degrees). The reflective reader does not always use all of them, but chooses from among them given 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

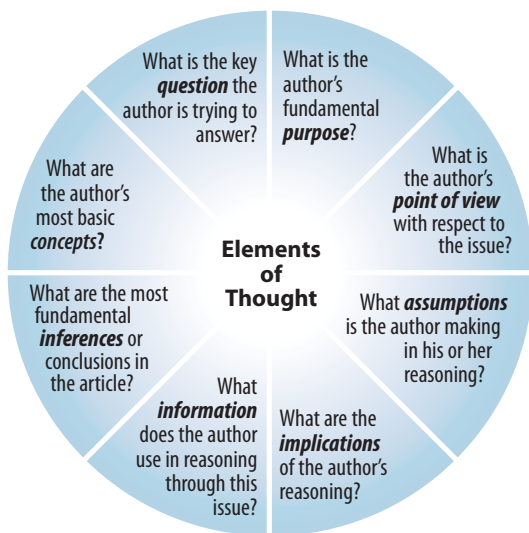
Explicating the Thesis of a Paragraph

1. State the main point of the paragraph in one or two sentences.
2. Then 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: Analysis

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: Evaluation

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 specifics 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 every other paragraph so that 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 about 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 the perspective of multiple views.
- 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 and 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 points of view. 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 points of view, especially points of view 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, and no doubt this was necessary, 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 ideas 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.

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 most questionable assumptions when you notice them:** Use the abbreviation *assump*.
8. **Record in the margin the most important implications of the thinking in the text 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

Circle around word or phrase	foundational or other important concept
def	an important definition
!, !!, or !!!	important conclusion
prob or issue	a key problem or issue the author is addressing
info, data, or evidence	author is addressing
POV	key point of view
Assump	a questionable assumption is being made
Implic	key implications or consequences
notes in margin or on extra pages	reader's thoughts being recorded
diagrams	drawing by the reader to show interrelationships between important 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; and 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 a 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 point of view 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 in your own words a given phrase or sentence. 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 paraphrase 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 Section. 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 Reading: 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 Reading: Sample 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 every person is as good as any other, and the truth that 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 it to protect our rights. Governments should not rule us; we should rule the government.

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 all of us 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 is failing to provide us with our natural rights, we should start a new government that does.

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 of such citizens but also the obligation of such citizens, to revolt against the government and set up a new one that upholds its natural rights.

Second Sample Reading: Thesis of the Declaration

Directions: Complete the following four tasks: 1) State the thesis of the passage in your own words. 2) Elaborate 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 — if and 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 revolutionary 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; and 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 Sample Reading: 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, 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; and 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, 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 important, 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 Sample Reading: Evaluation of 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 follows 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 Reading: Role Playing

Directions: You may now deepen your insight even more by role-playing the principal author of the declaration, namely, 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.

On 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.

First Reading: 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 Reading: Sample 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, when they rise above needing 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 a country. 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 the opportunity to take advantage of the expressed purposes and goals of the government. In other words, this problem seems to be almost a natural implication of an established government (given historical examples).

Second Reading: 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 the best.

But people can have such a government only when they think well enough to demand it and 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.

On 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 Reading: 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 Reading: Sample 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 in such a way that one can decide for oneself what is right or wrong, based on one's own ethical sense of right and wrong, 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 what is right. 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,

for example, that reducing injustice leads to even greater injustice. If this is likely to happen, don't try to change the system. Let it keep functioning as it is.

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: But if the problems within the government are so great that by adhering to laws, you deny someone a fundamental human right, you are ethically obligated to break the law. In that case, stand up against the government. Do whatever you can to stop the government from unjust actions.

Second Reading: The Thesis of *Civil Disobedience*

Statement of Thesis

People need to behave more in accordance with their conscience than in accordance with the law. If a law requires you to behave in an unjust way toward another, you are ethically obligated to break the law.

Elaboration of Thesis

Some laws might be considered necessary evils, because to change such laws would lead only to greater injustices than the original law. But if the only way to change a truly unjust law is to refuse to abide by the law, a person of conscience will refuse. People should be willing to sacrifice themselves to reduce injustice caused by unfair laws.

Exemplification of Thesis

For example, in the U.S. during the 1800s, after slaves in the north were freed, many people helped slaves in the south escape to the north. Though they risked imprisonment for helping free slaves on southern plantations, many people were willing to do this rather than abide by an unjust law.

Illustration of Thesis

Think of how we teach children to behave with respect to their peer group. Often a peer group will expect everyone in the group to accept an unjust act. For example, it is common for bullying to be practiced toward outsiders of children's peer groups. Bullying, then, becomes the accepted practice. Those in the group who object to bullying are usually subjected to penalties from the group — for example, they may be ridiculed. Nevertheless, we have taught children well only when they are ready to rebel against the authority of the peer group. So too should adults rebel when dealing with unjust laws passed by their government.

The Nineteenth-Century American

Background Information: This excerpt is from the book, *The American Mind*, by the distinguished historian Henry Steele Commager.

In one realm the American was a conformist, and that was the realm of morals. Although he did not always observe them, he accepted without question the moral standards of the Puritans, and if a later generation was to find him repressed and inhibited, there is little evidence that he was conscious of his sufferings. . . Conformity and conventionalism in matters of morals sometimes assumed aggressive form, and the willingness to resign control of the whole field of culture to women combined with the tradition of Puritanism to encourage intolerance and justify censorship. Language was emasculated, literature expurgated, art censored. Piano legs were draped with pantalets, words like belly and breast dropped from polite conversation, the discussion of sex confined to men and obstetrics to women, while Shakespeare and Fielding joined French writers generally in disrepute. Early in the century a furor was raised when Hiram Powers exhibited his undraped "Greek Slave," and at the end of the century Thomas Eakins, perhaps the greatest of American painters, was driven from the Pennsylvania Academy when he used male models in mixed classes. Dancing, plays, and mixed bathing came under the ban. Censorship of art and literature slid easily into censorship of morals, especially those having to do with love and drinking; modesty degenerated into Comstockery and the temperance movement into prohibition.

For this passage we provide a first and second reading.

First Reading: Paraphrasing

In one realm the American was a conformist, and that was the realm of morals.

PARAPHRASE:

Although he did not always observe them, he accepted without question the moral standards of the Puritans,

PARAPHRASE:

and if a later generation was to find him repressed and inhibited, there is little evidence that he was conscious of his sufferings.

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Piano legs were draped with pantalets, words like belly and breast dropped from polite conversation, the discussion of sex confined to men and obstetrics to women, while Shakespeare and Fielding joined French writers generally in disrepute. Early in the century a furor was raised when Hiram Powers exhibited his undraped "Greek Slave," and at the end of the century Thomas Eakins, perhaps the greatest of American painters, was driven from the Pennsylvania Academy when he used male models in mixed classes.

PARAPHRASE:

Dancing, plays, and mixed bathing came under the ban. Censorship of art and literature slid easily into censorship of morals, especially those having to do with love and drinking; modesty degenerated into Comstockery and the temperance movement into prohibition.

PARAPHRASE:

First Reading: Sample Interpretation

In one realm the American was a conformist, and that was the realm of morals.

PARAPHRASE: Though Americans may have been independent thinkers in some domains of their lives, they did not think independently about social and religious understandings of what is right and wrong.

Although he did not always observe them, he accepted without question the moral standards of the Puritans,

PARAPHRASE: Though Americans did not always live in accordance with a Puritanical view of right and wrong, they nevertheless did not question the dominant idea that a Puritan outlook was morally correct and obligatory.

and if a later generation was to find him repressed and inhibited, there is little evidence that he was conscious of his sufferings.

PARAPHRASE: If a historical view now shows the nineteenth-century American to be hampered and inwardly intimidated by these Puritanical rules, there is little proof that he had any awareness of the negative impact that these beliefs were having on him.

Conformity and conventionalism in matters of morals sometimes assumed aggressive form, and the willingness to resign control of the whole field of culture to women combined with the tradition of Puritanism to encourage intolerance and justify censorship. Language was emasculated, literature expurgated, art censored.

PARAPHRASE: The whole range of "acceptable" behavior significantly narrowed, especially anything having to do with human sexuality or sensuality. The enforcement of a narrow set of norms became militant and warlike. As women increasingly dictated what is and is not "moral" within society, as Puritanism increasingly influenced culture, intolerance and censorship seemed equivalent to standing up for what is right, decent, and just. Freedom of speech and expression

were undermined and curtailed. Officials assumed the authority to make sweeping judgments about printed material, movies, and the arts, and to suppress any parts of these materials on the basis of perceived “obscurity” and a threat to security. As a result, books, movies, and the arts considered acceptable were generally those with questionable literary and artistic quality. Conversely, the range of ideas and practices considered “offensive” was greatly expanded.

Piano legs were draped with pantalets, words like belly and breast dropped from polite conversation, the discussion of sex confined to men and obstetrics to women, while Shakespeare and Fielding joined French writers generally in disrepute. Early in the century a furor was raised when Hiram Powers exhibited his undraped “Greek Slave,” and at the end of the century Thomas Eakins, perhaps the greatest of American painters, was driven from the Pennsylvania Academy when he used male models in mixed classes.

PARAPHRASE: Essentially anything considered overtly, or even subtly, sexual, was removed from public viewing and could not be publicly discussed. People who disagreed with puritanical views were ridiculed and ostracized, if not persecuted or prosecuted. Even piano legs had to be covered because they appeared to the puritanical mind to be sexually erotic. Many commonly used words were no longer socially acceptable because they seemed crude and vulgar. Women were not allowed to discuss sex, and men were not allowed to discuss childbirth. Writers of classics such as Shakespeare and Fielding were considered vulgar, along with the French writers; and an artist who used nude male models in classes with both genders was banned from an art academy.

Dancing, plays, and mixed bathing came under the ban. Censorship of art and literature slid easily into censorship of morals, especially those having to do with love and drinking; modesty degenerated into Comstockery and the temperance movement into prohibition.

PARAPHRASE: Due to this religious fervor sweeping the country, dancing, attending plays, and swimming in mixed company were all banned. Disallowing certain ideas to be exhibited in the arts and literature led to the disallowing of personal rights, such as the right to drink alcohol and the freedom to choose one’s own behavior within romantic relationships. Being sexually reserved was transformed into obsessive puritanism and censorship, and prudent drinking of alcohol transformed into laws against all drinking, whether public or private.

Second Reading: Thesis of *The Nineteenth-Century American*

Statement of Thesis

Nineteenth-century Americans were unquestioning puritanical conformists, especially the women, who came to dominate a strict conventional sexual morality and impose it on all facets of culture and art.

Elaboration of Thesis

In other words, morality was dictated by sexual convention. Violations of sexual conventions were kept secret. Intolerance and censorship were the rule. Dogmatic inflexibility was developed in every dimension of American life. This puritanical fanaticism led to violations of individual rights.

Exemplification of Thesis

For example, “piano legs were draped with pantalets, words like belly and breast dropped from polite conversation. . . and at the end of the century Thomas Eakins, perhaps the greatest of American painters, was driven from the Pennsylvania Academy when he used male models in mixed classes. . . Dancing, plays, and mixed bathing came under the ban.”

Illustration of Thesis

People in nineteenth-century America perceived the world in largely childlike, simplistic terms. As with groups of children, dissent was ridiculed. Those who didn't go along with the group were ostracized. Social hysteria and witch-hunts became common events. A worldview of unsophisticated cowboys versus Indians, good guys versus bad guys became the rule. To this day, American political and social thinking continues to suffer from this same cultural narrowness of mind. Consider U.S. President Bush's recent characterization of the world as dividing into those who are “good” and those who are “evil,” and his challenge to all countries in the world to decide, therefore, whether they are “for us or against us” implying that there is no other choice possible. Compare the comment of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Nobel laureate, who said, “If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.”

The Art of Loving

Background Information: These passages are from the book, *The Art of Loving*, by the distinguished psychologist Erich Fromm.

Is love an art? Then it requires knowledge and effort. Or is love a pleasant sensation, which to experience is a matter of chance, something one “falls into” if one is lucky? This little book is based on the former premise, while undoubtedly the majority of people today believe in the latter.

Not that people think that love is not important. They are starved for it; they watch endless numbers of films about happy and unhappy love stories, they listen to hundreds of trashy songs about love — yet hardly anyone thinks that there is anything that needs to be learned about love.

This peculiar attitude is based on several premises which either singly or combined tend to uphold it. Most people see the problem of love primarily as that of being loved, rather than that of loving, of one's capacity to love. Hence the problem to them is how to be loved, how to be lovable. In pursuit of this aim they follow several paths. One, which is especially used by men, is to be successful, to be as powerful and rich as the social margin of one's position permits. Another, used especially by women, is to make oneself attractive, by cultivating one's body, dress, etc. Other ways of making oneself attractive, used both by men and women, are to develop pleasant manners, interesting conversation, to be helpful, modest, inoffensive. Many of the ways to make oneself lovable are the same as those used to make oneself successful, “to win friends and influence people.” As a matter of fact, what most people in our culture mean by being lovable is essentially a mixture between being popular and having sex appeal.

The active character of love becomes evident in the fact that it always implies certain basic elements, common to all forms of love. These are care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge. . . . Love is the active concern for the life and the growth of that which we love. . . . Respect is the ability to see a person as he is, to be aware of his unique individuality. Respect means the concern that the other person should grow and unfold as he is. Respect, thus, implies the absence of exploitation. I want the loved person to grow and unfold for his own sake, and in his own ways, and not for the purpose of serving me. If I love the other person, I feel one with him or her, but with him as he is, not as I need him to be as an object for my use. It is clear that respect is possible only if I have achieved independence; if I can stand and walk without needing crutches, without having to dominate and exploit anyone else. Respect exists only on the basis of freedom: ‘l'amour est l'enfant de la liberté’ as an old French song says; love is the child of freedom, never of domination. . . . To love somebody is not just a strong feeling — it is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise.

For this passage we provide a first and second reading.

First Reading: Paraphrasing

Is love an art? Then it requires knowledge and effort.

PARAPHRASE:

Or is love a pleasant sensation, which to experience is a matter of chance, something one “falls into” if one is lucky?

PARAPHRASE:

This little book is based on the former premise, while undoubtedly the majority of people today believe in the latter.

PARAPHRASE:

Not that people think that love is not important. They are starved for it; they watch endless numbers of films about happy and unhappy love stories, they listen to hundreds of trashy songs about love — yet hardly anyone thinks that there is anything that needs to be learned about love.

PARAPHRASE:

This peculiar attitude is based on several premises which either singly or combined tend to uphold it. Most people see the problem of love primarily as that of being loved, rather than that of loving, of one's capacity to love. Hence the problem to them is how to be loved, how to be lovable.

PARAPHRASE:

In pursuit of this aim they follow several paths. One, which is especially used by men, is to be successful, to be as powerful and rich as the social margin of one's position permits. Another, used especially by women, is to make oneself attractive, by cultivating one's body, dress, etc.

PARAPHRASE:

Other ways of making oneself attractive, used both by men and women, are to develop pleasant manners, interesting conversation, to be helpful, modest, inoffensive. Many of the ways to make oneself lovable are the same as those used to make oneself successful, “to win friends and influence people.” As a matter of fact, what most people in our culture mean by being lovable is essentially a mixture between being popular and having sex appeal.

PARAPHRASE:

The active character of love becomes evident in the fact that it always implies certain basic elements, common to all forms of love. These are care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge... Love is the active concern for the life and the growth of that which we love...

PARAPHRASE:

Respect is the ability to see a person as he is, to be aware of his unique individuality. Respect means the concern that the other person should grow and unfold as he is. Respect, thus, implies the absence of exploitation. I want the loved person to grow and unfold for his own sake, and in his own ways, and not for the purpose of serving me. If I love the other person, I feel one with him or her, but with him as he is, not as I need him to be as an object for my use.

PARAPHRASE:

It is clear that respect is possible only if I have achieved independence; if I can stand and walk without needing crutches, without having to dominate and exploit anyone else. Respect exists only on the basis of freedom: 'l'amour est l'enfant de la liberté' as an old French song says; love is the child of freedom, never of domination.

PARAPHRASE:

To love somebody is not just a strong feeling — it is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise.

PARAPHRASE:

First Reading: Sample Interpretation

Is love an art? Then it requires knowledge and effort.

PARAPHRASE: If love is an art, involving skills and abilities, it requires deep understanding and the motivation to apply that understanding.

Or is love a pleasant sensation, which to experience is a matter of chance, something one "falls into" if one is lucky?

PARAPHRASE: Or perhaps love is strictly an enjoyable physical feeling, not something requiring skill, but rather an accidental occurrence or coincidence that just happens to people.

This little book is based on the former premise, while undoubtedly the majority of people today believe in the latter.

PARAPHRASE: The book, *The Art of Loving*, is based on the assumption that love requires skills and insights that must be developed, as well as commitment, though most people do not see love in this way. Rather, they see it as something that happens by sheer luck.

Not that people think that love is not important. They are starved for it; they watch endless numbers of films about happy and unhappy love stories, they listen to hundreds of trashy songs about love — yet hardly anyone thinks that there is anything that needs to be learned about love.

PARAPHRASE: Most people value love, at least at some level. In fact, they crave it. We know this because they watch innumerable movies about love and listen to endless

vulgar songs about love. Yet, almost no one thinks that the ability to love is something that must be learned.

This peculiar attitude is based on several premises which either singly or combined tend to uphold it. Most people see the problem of love primarily as that of being loved, rather than that of loving, of one's capacity to love. Hence the problem to them is how to be loved, how to be lovable.

PARAPHRASE: This dysfunctional way in which people tend to think of love is based on one or more beliefs they hold about love. People primarily see the difficulty of love as trying to figure out how to get love from someone else rather than giving love to someone else. They therefore focus their energy on getting others to love them. They try to appear engaging, charming, or adorable to attract a lover.

In pursuit of this aim they follow several paths. One, which is especially used by men, is to be successful, to be as powerful and rich as the social margin of one's position permits. Another, used especially by women, is to make oneself attractive, by cultivating one's body, dress, etc.

PARAPHRASE: To achieve the goal of "being lovable," men tend to use a different strategy than women use. Men strive to achieve a position of status, which usually involves having as much power and money as they can. Women tend to emphasize making themselves physically attractive to the opposite sex, through adorning their body, attending to their clothing, and the like.

Other ways of making oneself attractive, used both by men and women, are to develop pleasant manners, interesting conversation, to be helpful, modest, inoffensive. Many of the ways to make oneself lovable are the same as those used to make oneself successful, "to win friends and influence people." As a matter of fact, what most people in our culture mean by being lovable is essentially a mixture between being popular and having sex appeal.

PARAPHRASE: Both men and women strive for appealing manners and a conversational style that renders them attractive, and therefore "lovable" to the opposite sex. They try to appear cooperative, supportive, unassuming, and unobjectionable. These same strategies are used to appear successful in others' eyes, to gain friends and win over people. To most people, being lovable is really the same as being sexy and well-liked.

The active character of [genuine] love becomes evident in the fact that it always implies certain basic elements, common to all forms of love. These are care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge... Love is the active concern for the life and the growth of that which we love...

PARAPHRASE: Certain basic parts of love exist within any form of real love. These are thoughtfulness, dependability, consideration, and understanding. When we love someone, we seek their best welfare. We show our concern for what happens to them.

Respect is the ability to see a person as he is, to be aware of his unique individuality. Respect means the concern that the other person should grow and unfold as he is. Respect, thus, implies the absence of exploitation. I want the loved person to grow and unfold for his own sake, and in his own ways, and not for the purpose of serving me. If I love the other person, I feel one with him or her, but with him as he is, not as I need him to be as an object for my use.

PARAPHRASE: When we respect others, we don't need to idealize them. We can see them as they really are, as persons with distinctive characteristics. We want them to develop as they want to develop and be what they want to be. We do not treat them as objects to be used for our own selfish interests. When we love others, we feel deeply connected to them as they are, with all their unique qualities.

It is clear that respect is possible only if I have achieved independence; if I can stand and walk without needing crutches, without having to dominate and exploit anyone else. Respect exists only on the basis of freedom: 'l'amour est l'enfant de la liberté' as an old French song says; love is the child of freedom, never of domination.

PARAPHRASE: I can respect another only if I am myself an autonomous person, if I can stand on my own two feet, without the need to lean on others for support, without the need to use others, to control them so that they might serve me. Respect can happen only when people are allowed to be what they want to be, never when they are being forced to live a certain way against their will.

To love somebody is not just a strong feeling — it is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise.

PARAPHRASE: Love is not just a feeling. It is a choice, a resolution, a commitment, a pledge.

Second Reading: Thesis of *The Art of Loving*

Statement of Thesis

Loving another person is an art. It requires knowledge, skill, and insight. Genuine love doesn't just happen to people. It must be cultivated through deep commitment. This way of looking at love is very different from the way most people do.

Elaboration of Thesis

We need to change the way we think about love. We should abandon images that imply that love is mysterious and beyond our control. We should see it as a form of strength in which we give to others what enhances their well-being. When we are weak, we want others to hold us up, to protect us, to take care of us. Weakness is not a sound basis for giving love. When we truly love others, we want them to develop and grow. We do not use them to serve us.

Exemplification of Thesis

In many Hollywood films and soap operas, love is associated with passionate, out-of-control accusations and cruel acts, often followed by apologies and sexual intimacy. Jealousy, envy, and an attempt to control the other are all commonplace in the public image of lovers in action. Genuine love, as a long-term commitment to the well-being of others, does not make for action-packed drama. Portrayals of genuine love are rarely depicted in Hollywood films.

Illustration of Thesis

Defective forms of love are like a suffocating vine that attaches itself to a plant and eventually kills it. The vine dominates the plant, requiring the plant to submit to its domination. But genuine love neither dominates nor submits. Genuine love can exist only between relative equals, like two plants growing side by side, sharing the same sunlight and soil nutrients, allowing one another the space to grow as unique individuals.

Corn-Pone Opinions

Background Information: This excerpt, written by the distinguished novelist and social critic Mark Twain, is found in *The Portable Mark Twain*. By “corn-pone opinions” Twain meant the tendency of people to abandon any view or belief “which might interfere with their bread and butter. . . . In matters of large moment, like politics and religion, he must think and feel with the bulk of his neighbors or suffer damage in his social standing and in his business prosperity.”

I am persuaded that a coldly-thought-out and independent verdict upon a fashion in clothes, or manners, or literature, or politics, or religion, or any other matter . . . is a most rare thing — if it has indeed ever existed. . . . Mohammedans are Mohammedans because they are born and reared among that sect, not because they have thought it out and can furnish sound reasons for being Mohammedans; we know why Catholics are Catholics; why Presbyterians are Presbyterians, why Baptists are Baptists, why Mormons are Mormons, why thieves are thieves, why monarchists are monarchists, why Republicans are Republicans and Democrats, Democrats. . . . Men think they think upon great political questions, and they do; but they think with their party, not independently; they read its literature but not that of the other side; they arrive at convictions but they are drawn from a partial view of the matter in hand and are of no particular value. . . . We all do no end of feeling and we mistake it for thinking. And out of it we get an aggregation which we consider a boon. Its name is Public Opinion. It is held in reverence. It settles everything. Some think it the Voice of God.

For this and all remaining passages we provide a first reading only.

First Reading: Paraphrasing

I am persuaded that a coldly-thought-out and independent verdict upon a fashion in clothes, or manners, or literature, or politics, or religion, or any other matter. . . . is a most rare thing — if it has indeed ever existed. . . .

PARAPHRASE:

Mohammedans are Mohammedans because they are born and reared among that sect, not because they have thought it out and can furnish sound reasons for being Mohammedans; we know why Catholics are Catholics; why Presbyterians are Presbyterians, why Baptists are Baptists, why Mormons are Mormons, why thieves are thieves, why monarchists are monarchists, why Republicans are Republicans and Democrats, Democrats. . . .

PARAPHRASE:

Men think they think upon great political questions, and they do; but they think with their party, not independently; they read its literature but not that of the other side; they arrive at convictions but they are drawn from a partial view of the matter in hand and are of no particular value. . . .

PARAPHRASE:

We all do no end of feeling and we mistake it for thinking. And out of it we get an aggregation which we consider a boon. Its name is Public Opinion. It is held in reverence. It settles everything. Some think it the Voice of God.

PARAPHRASE:

First Reading: Sample Interpretation

I am persuaded that a coldly-thought-out and independent verdict upon a fashion in clothes, or manners, or literature, or politics, or religion, or any other matter... is a most rare thing — if it has indeed ever existed...

PARAPHRASE: People do not think independently, but rather as part of a mass. I firmly believe, based on the evidence I have seen, that people rarely, if ever, think autonomously and rationally about the clothes they wear, the social rules to which they adhere, the books they choose to read, the political or religious views they hold, indeed about anything whatsoever.

Mohammedans are Mohammedans because they are born and reared among that sect, not because they have thought it out and can furnish sound reasons for being Mohammedans; we know why Catholics are Catholics; why Presbyterians are Presbyterians, why Baptists are Baptists, why Mormons are Mormons, why thieves are thieves, why monarchists are monarchists, why Republicans are Republicans and Democrats, Democrats...

PARAPHRASE: People maintain their ideological and belief systems because they were raised within those systems, not because they have critically analyzed their beliefs. This truth is exemplified by the fact that people belong to the same religious groups within which they were born. The same sort of indoctrination occurs within any social system, religious, political, or otherwise.

Men think they think upon great political questions, and they do; but they think with their party, not independently; they read its literature but not that of the other side; they arrive at convictions but they are drawn from a partial view of the matter in hand and are of no particular value...

PARAPHRASE: People see themselves as thinking through important political questions, and they do think about those questions. But rather than think autonomously, they think within the perspectives of their political party. They read to understand their own party's views, but they do not read dissenting views. People hold fast to their views, but because those views are so narrow in focus, they are essentially worthless.

We all do no end of feeling and we mistake it for thinking. And out of it we get an aggregation which we consider a boon. Its name is Public Opinion. It is held in reverence. It settles everything. Some think it the Voice of God.

PARAPHRASE: People often come to situations with a lot of emotional energy, but that energy is mistaken for rational thought. Collectively we validate our group's beliefs, and we get more emotional energy from sharing group goals and perspectives. We feel more powerful. We call these collective beliefs "public opinion." We worship our group ideology. We see it as "the truth." Some even see it as divine truth from God.

The Revolt of the Masses

Background Information: In the book, *The Revolt of the Masses*, thinker and social critic, Jose Ortega y Gasset wrote:

There is one fact which, whether for good or ill, is of utmost importance in the public life of Europe at the present moment. This fact is the accession of the masses to complete social power. As the masses, by definition neither should nor can direct their own personal existence, and still less rule society in general, this fact means that actually Europe is suffering from the greatest crisis that can afflict peoples, nations, and civilization. . . . Society is always a dynamic unity of two component factors: minorities and masses. The minorities are individuals or groups of individuals which are specially qualified. The mass is the assemblage of persons not specifically qualified. . . . The select man is not the petulant person who thinks himself superior to the rest, but the man who demands more of himself than the rest. . . . For there is no doubt that the most radical division that it is possible to make of humanity is that which splits it into two classes of creatures: those who make great demands on themselves...and those who demand nothing special of themselves. . . . The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated.

First Reading: Paraphrasing

There is one fact which, whether for good or ill, is of utmost importance in the public life of Europe at the present moment. This fact is the accession of the masses to complete social power...

PARAPHRASE:

As the masses, by definition neither should nor can direct their own personal existence, and still less rule society in general, this fact means that actually Europe is suffering from the greatest crisis that can afflict peoples, nations, and civilization...

PARAPHRASE:

Society is always a dynamic unity of two component factors: minorities and masses. The minorities are individuals or groups of individuals which are specially qualified. The mass is the assemblage of persons not specifically qualified...

PARAPHRASE:

The select man is not the petulant person who thinks himself superior to the rest, but the man who demands more of himself than the rest...

PARAPHRASE:

For there is no doubt that the most radical division that it is possible to make of humanity is that which splits it into two classes of creatures: those who make great demands on themselves...and those who demand nothing special of themselves...

PARAPHRASE:

The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated.

PARAPHRASE:

First Reading: Sample Interpretation

There is one fact which, whether for good or ill, is of utmost importance in the public life of Europe at the present moment. This fact is the accession of the masses to complete social power...

PARAPHRASE: One of the most important things going on right now in Europe is that the majority of ordinary people are gaining absolute control over their society.

As the masses, by definition neither should nor can direct their own personal existence, and still less rule society in general, this fact means that actually Europe is suffering from the greatest crisis that can afflict peoples, nations, and civilization...

PARAPHRASE: Because the overwhelming majority of people, as a whole, are incapable of guiding their own individual behavior, and even less able to guide the broader culture, Europe is experiencing a turning point greater than any other turning point imaginable.

Society is always a dynamic unity of two component factors: minorities and masses. The minorities are individuals or groups of individuals which are specially qualified. The mass is the assemblage of persons not specifically qualified...

PARAPHRASE: Culture as a whole is influenced by a powerful interrelationship between people who are individualists and those who are conformists. Individualists always have certain skills or competencies. Large groups of conformists who think alike are typically incompetent as persons.

The select man is not the petulant person who thinks himself superior to the rest, but the man who demands more of himself than the rest...

PARAPHRASE: Truly competent people are not easily annoyed by petty things, nor are they arrogant. Rather, they expect more of themselves than they do of others and hold themselves to higher standards.

For there is no doubt that the most radical division that it is possible to make of humanity is that which splits it into two classes of creatures: those who make great demands on themselves...and those who demand nothing special of themselves...

PARAPHRASE: The most significant and deep-seated difference between people is the division between those who have great expectations of themselves and those who don't push themselves to do anything important or unique.

The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated.

PARAPHRASE: Society as a whole does not tolerate people who are unique, competent, and who strive to develop themselves. Nor can it tolerate anything within society that is superb in quality. Those people who refuse to pattern themselves after the mob, who think for themselves, are in danger of being eradicated. (It is unclear at this point whether the author is saying that unique people would be killed by the masses, or whether he means to imply that they couldn't function openly within society with their alternative views and, therefore, would become more like the masses in order to survive.)

The True Believer

Background Information: This is an excerpt from the preface of a book entitled *The True Believer* by Eric Hoffer.

All mass movements generate in their adherents a readiness to die and a proclivity for united action; all of them, irrespective of the doctrine they preach and the program they project, breed fanaticism, enthusiasm, fervent hope, hatred and intolerance; all of them are capable of releasing a powerful flow of activity in certain departments of life; all of them demand blind faith and singlehearted allegiance... Though there are obvious differences between the fanatical Christian, the fanatical Mohammedan, the fanatical nationalist, the fanatical Communist and the fanatical Nazi, it is yet true that the fanaticism which animates them may be viewed and treated as one. The same is true of the force which drives them on to expansion and world dominion. There is a certain uniformity in all types of dedication, of faith, of pursuit of power, of unity and of self-sacrifice. There are vast differences in the contents of holy causes and doctrines, but a certain uniformity in the factors which make them effective... However different the holy causes people die for, they perhaps die basically for the same thing.

First Reading: Paraphrasing

All mass movements generate in their adherents a readiness to die and a proclivity for united action;

PARAPHRASE:

all of them, irrespective of the doctrine they preach and the program they project, breed fanaticism, enthusiasm, fervent hope, hatred and intolerance;

PARAPHRASE:

all of them are capable of releasing a powerful flow of activity in certain departments of life;

PARAPHRASE:

all of them demand blind faith and singlehearted allegiance...

PARAPHRASE:

Though there are obvious differences between the fanatical Christian, the fanatical Mohammedan, the fanatical nationalist, the fanatical Communist and the fanatical Nazi, it is yet true that the fanaticism which animates them may be viewed and treated as one.

PARAPHRASE:

The same is true of the force which drives them on to expansion and world dominion.

PARAPHRASE:

There is a certain uniformity in all types of dedication, of faith, of pursuit of power, of unity and of self-sacrifice. There are vast differences in the contents of holy causes and doctrines, but a certain uniformity in the factors which make them effective... However different the holy causes people die for, they perhaps die basically for the same thing.

PARAPHRASE:

First Reading: Sample Interpretation

All mass movements generate in their adherents a readiness to die and a proclivity for united action;

PARAPHRASE: All uprisings by large groups of people foster in their followers a willingness to die for their cause, and an inclination to act as a cohesive unit in achieving their goals.

all of them, irrespective of the doctrine they preach and the program they project, breed fanaticism, enthusiasm, fervent hope, hatred and intolerance;

PARAPHRASE: All of these uprisings, regardless of their underlying ideals, values, and beliefs, and regardless of the changes they are calling for, foster bigotry, narrow-mindedness, over-zealousness, rigidity, loathing of those who oppose them, and an unwillingness to consider alternative ways of looking at things.

all of them are capable of releasing a powerful flow of activity in certain departments of life;

PARAPHRASE: Because of the development of fanaticism in mass movements, they can generate an enormous amount of energy and force in what they do.

all of them demand blind faith and singlehearted allegiance...

PARAPHRASE: All such movements require followers to unquestioningly accept dogmas and adhere to the rigid beliefs of the group.

Though there are obvious differences between the fanatical Christian, the fanatical Mohammedan, the fanatical nationalist, the fanatical Communist and the fanatical Nazi, it is yet true that the fanaticism which animates them may be viewed and treated as one.

PARAPHRASE: Fanatic believers in any system of beliefs have more in common with their (fanatical) counterparts in opposing systems of beliefs than they do with those who refuse to believe in an unquestioning manner. In other words, fanatical mindsets are essentially alike, despite dissimilarities in the content of what they are fanatical about.

The same is true of the force which drives them on to expansion and world dominion.

PARAPHRASE: It is predictable that fanatical groups will develop grandiose ends, such as attempting to control all events in the world. Because they think they are absolutely right, even that they speak with the voice of God, they force their beliefs on anyone and everyone in the world.

There is a certain uniformity in all types of dedication, of faith, of pursuit of power, of unity and of self-sacrifice. There are vast differences in the contents of holy causes and doctrines, but a certain uniformity in the factors which make them effective. . . . However different the holy causes people die for, they perhaps die basically for the same thing.

PARAPHRASE: When groups of people come to believe that they are possessed of a holy doctrine and a holy cause, they begin to act in the same fanatical way. The fact that they are all ready to blindly follow orders and do whatever leaders deem necessary to the cause, makes them look very much mirror images of each other, independent of what it is they fanatically believe in. In some sense, all fanatics share the same underlying assumption: that everyone ought to agree with them and think and act as they think and act. Whenever people in a mass movement believe they possess the absolute truth, fanaticism is engendered in their members, a willingness to conform their behavior to the group rules, and even a willingness to die for the cause.

The Idea of Education

Background Information: In 1851, John Henry Newman wrote his famous set of lectures, “Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education,” which in 1952 became *The Idea of a University*. This book focuses on Newman’s vision of education.

All I say is, call things by their right names, and do not confuse together ideas which are essentially different. A thorough knowledge of one science and a superficial acquaintance with many are not the same thing; a smattering of a hundred things or a memory for detail, is not a . . . comprehensive view . . . Do not say, the people must be educated, when, after all, you only mean amused, refreshed, soothed, put into good spirits and good humor, or kept from vicious excesses . . . Education is a high word; it is the preparation for knowledge, and it is the imparting of knowledge in proportion to that preparation . . . It is education which gives a man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them. It teaches him to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical, and to discard what is irrelevant . . . It shows him how to accommodate himself to others, how to throw himself into their state of mind, how to bring before them his own, how to influence them, how to come to an understanding with them, how to bear with them . . . He knows when to speak and when to be silent; he is able to converse, he is able to listen; he can ask a question pertinently, and gain a lesson seasonably, when nothing to impart himself.

First Reading: Paraphrasing

All I say is, call things by their right names, and do not confuse together ideas which are essentially different.

PARAPHRASE:

A thorough knowledge of one science and a superficial acquaintance with many are not the same thing;

PARAPHRASE:

a smattering of a hundred things or a memory for detail, is not . . . a comprehensive view . . .

PARAPHRASE:

Do not say, the people must be educated, when, after all, you only mean amused, refreshed, soothed, put into good spirits and good humor, or kept from vicious excesses . . .

PARAPHRASE:

Education is a high word; it is the preparation for knowledge, and it is the imparting of knowledge in proportion to that preparation . . .

PARAPHRASE:

It is education which gives a man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them.

PARAPHRASE:

It teaches him to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical, and to discard what is irrelevant...

PARAPHRASE:

It shows him how to accommodate himself to others, how to throw himself into their state of mind, how to bring before them his own, how to influence them, how to come to an understanding with them, how to bear with them...

PARAPHRASE:

He knows when to speak and when to be silent; he is able to converse, he is able to listen; he can ask a question pertinently, and gain a lesson seasonably, when nothing to impart himself.

PARAPHRASE:

First Reading: Sample Interpretation

All I say is, call things by their right names, and do not confuse together ideas which are essentially different.

PARAPHRASE: My main point is that people should choose their words carefully so that they clearly distinguish ideas that are different from each other.

A thorough knowledge of one science and a superficial acquaintance with many, are not the same thing;

PARAPHRASE: Having deep understanding and command of one subject or discipline, and knowing a little bit about a lot of subjects are very different things and should not be confused with one another.

a smattering of a hundred things or a memory for detail, is not a...comprehensive view...

PARAPHRASE: Knowing a little about a lot of things or being adept at remembering specifics is not the same as being able to think abstractly about important topics. Nor is it the same as having a broad perspective.

Do not say, the people must be educated, when, after all, you only mean amused, refreshed, soothed, put into good spirits and good humor, or kept from vicious excesses...

PARAPHRASE: Do not confuse education with enjoyment or entertainment, or with being rejuvenated or energized. Do not confuse education with being made comfortable or content. And don't say that a person is educated merely because he or she avoids immoderate or unrestrained behavior.

Education is a high word; it is the preparation for knowledge, and it is the imparting of knowledge in proportion to that preparation...

PARAPHRASE: The concept of education has deep and significant meaning. It is not to be taken lightly, nor applied lightly. Education prepares the mind to understand and to learn important ideas. It enables one to take possession of knowledge and apply it.

It is education which gives a man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them.

PARAPHRASE: Through education one comes to know truly and deeply what one believes and why one believes it. It brings integrity to the process of belief; and it enables one to express what one believes with grace, style, and power.

It teaches him to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical, and to discard what is irrelevant...

PARAPHRASE: Education fosters the ability to see what is actually true in a situation, to see through what is irrelevant in order to focus on what is important and relevant. When people are educated, they cannot be manipulated by people who use language in deceptive ways, people who say one thing and mean another.

It shows him how to accommodate himself to others, how to throw himself into their state of mind, how to bring before them his own, how to influence them, how to come to an understanding with them, how to bear with them...

PARAPHRASE: Education enables people to think within multiple viewpoints, to empathize with the views of others in order to understand them. It enables people to rationally present their own arguments, using good reasons to persuade others of their views. It enables people to take into account reasonable viewpoints and arguments, and change their own views when faced with more reasonable views. It enables them to listen carefully and comprehend the views of others and be patient with those who are not patient themselves.

He knows when to speak and when to be silent; he is able to converse, he is able to listen; he can ask a question pertinently, and gain a lesson seasonably, when nothing to impart himself.

PARAPHRASE: Educated persons realize when it makes sense to state their views aloud and when it makes sense to be quiet and listen to others. They know how to discuss ideas effectively with others. They are good listeners. They are good at asking questions that facilitate discussion. They are skilled learners, even when they have nothing to add to a conversation or situation themselves.

Appendix A: Sample Paraphrases¹

- └ “Duncan Looms Large in Finals” (lead on sports page article)
 - ➔ “The basketball star, Tim Duncan, is likely to play a crucial role in the final games of the basketball tourney.”
- └ “Serena Williams Stands Alone” (lead on sports page article)
 - ➔ “The tennis star, Serena Williams, is the only American player that has not been defeated in the French Open Tennis Tournament.”
- └ “Foreign Distrust of U.S. Increases” (headline on front page of newspaper)
 - ➔ “A survey of 20 nations shows widespread increases in distrust of the motives of the U.S. government.”
- └ “He who hesitates is lost.”
 - ➔ “There are important circumstances in which it is crucial for a person to act immediately in order to save himself or herself from disaster.”
- └ “A stitch in time saves nine.”
 - ➔ “There are circumstances in which we can avoid major loss or damage by making small timely moves to repair or adjust something.”
- └ “Money is the mother’s milk of politics.” (Lyndon Johnson)
 - ➔ “It is not possible to be successful in political contests unless one is successful in raising a great deal of money.”
 - ➔ “Money is the controlling force in politics.”
- └ “It is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven than it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.” (New Testament)
 - ➔ “It is not possible for a rich man to live an ethical life without giving up most of his wealth to better the lives of others.”
- └ “Sodium hydroxide and sulfuric acid react violently when mixed together.” (from chemistry lecture)
 - ➔ “When combined, the chemical structure of sodium hydroxide and sulfuric acid undergo an immediate change involving a large amount of heat and a significant release of energy.”
- └ “Faith and Glory Rule the Charts” (newspaper headline)
 - ➔ “God and religion are driving forces in one in six music hits.”
- └ “Is there another Earth out there?”
 - ➔ “Is there another planet like Earth in the Universe?”

1 Some of the following quotes come from newspaper article leads. Our paraphrases presuppose information in the article that are not included here.

Appendix B: Analyzing the Logic of an Article, Essay, or Chapter

One important way to understand an essay, article or chapter is through the analysis of the parts of the author's reasoning. Once you have done this, you can evaluate the author's reasoning using intellectual standards. Here is a template to follow:

- 1) The main purpose of this article is _____. (Here you are trying to state, as accurately as possible, the author's intent in writing the article. What was the author trying to accomplish?)
- 2) The key question that the author is addressing is _____. (Your goal is to figure out the key question that was in the mind of the author when he/she wrote the article. What was the key question addressed in the article?)
- 3) The most important information in this article is _____. (You want to identify the key information the author used, or presupposed, in the article to support his/her main arguments. Here you are looking for facts, experiences, and/or data the author is using to support his/her conclusions.)
- 4) The main inferences in this article are _____. (You want to identify the most important conclusions the author comes to and presents in the article.)
- 5) The key concept(s) we need to understand in this article is (are) _____. By these concepts the author means _____. (To identify these ideas, ask yourself: What are the most important ideas that you would have to know to understand the author's line of reasoning? Then briefly elaborate what the author means by these ideas.)
- 6) The main assumption(s) underlying the author's thinking is (are) _____. (Ask yourself: What is the author taking for granted [that might be questioned]? The assumptions are generalizations that the author does not think he/she has to defend in the context of writing the article, and they are usually unstated. This is where the author's thinking logically begins.)
- 7a) If we take this line of reasoning seriously, the implications are _____. (What consequences are likely to follow if people take the author's line of reasoning seriously? Here you are to pursue the logical implications of the author's position. You should include implications that the author states, and also those that the author does not state.)
- 7b) If we fail to take this line of reasoning seriously, the implications are _____. (What consequences are likely to follow if people ignore the author's reasoning?)
- 8) The main point(s) of view presented in this article is (are) _____. (The main question you are trying to answer here is: What is the author looking at, and how is he/she seeing it? For example, in this mini-guide we are looking at "analysis" and seeing it "as requiring one to understand" and routinely apply the elements of reasoning when thinking through problems, issues, subjects, etc.)

If you truly understand these structures as they interrelate in an article, essay, or chapter, you should be able to empathically role-play the thinking of the author. These are the eight basic structures that define all reasoning. They are the essential elements of thought.

Appendix C: The Logic of a Textbook

- 1) The main purpose of this textbook is _____.
- 2) The key question(s) that the author is addressing in the textbook is(are) _____.
- 3) The most important kinds of information in this textbook are _____.
- 4) The main inferences (and conclusions) in this textbook are _____.
- 5) The key concept(s) we need to understand in this textbook is(are) _____.
By these concepts the author means _____.
- 6) The main assumption(s) underlying the author's thinking is(are) _____.
- 7a) If people take the textbook seriously, the implications are _____.
- 7b) If people fail to take the textbook seriously, the implications are _____.
- 8) The main point(s) of view presented in this article is(are) _____.

Appendix D: The Logic of Ecology

Sample Third Level Reading of a Textbook

(A careful 3rd level reading of any ecology textbook should disclose essentially the following logic)

Goals of Ecologists: Ecologists seek to understand plants and animals as they exist in nature, with emphasis on their interrelationships, interdependence, and interactions with the environment. They work to understand all the influences that combine to produce and modify an animal or given plant, and thus to account for its existence and peculiarities within its habitat.

Questions Ecologists Ask: How do plants and animals interact? How do animals interact with each other? How do plants and animals depend on one another? How do the varying ecosystems function within themselves? How do they interact with other ecosystems? How are plants and animals affected by environmental influences? How do animals and plants grow, develop, die, and replace themselves? How do plants and animals create balances between each other? What happens when plants and animals become unbalanced?

Information Ecologists Use: The primary information used by ecologists is gained through observing plants and animals themselves, their interactions, and how they live within their environments. Ecologists note how animals and plants are born, how they reproduce, how they die, how they evolve, how they are affected by environmental changes. They also use information from other disciplines including chemistry, meteorology, and geology.

Judgments Ecologists Make: Ecologists make judgments about how ecosystems naturally function, about how animals and plants within them function, about why they function as they do. They make judgments about how ecosystems become out of balance and what can be done to bring them back into balance. They make judgments about how natural communities should be grouped and classified.

Concepts that Guide Ecologists' Thinking: One of the most fundamental concepts in ecology is "ecosystem," defined as a group of living things, dependent on one another and living in a particular habitat. Ecologists study how differing ecosystems function. Another key concept in ecology is "ecological succession," the natural pattern of change occurring within every ecosystem when natural processes are undisturbed. This pattern includes the birth, development, death, and then replacement of natural communities. Ecologists have grouped communities into larger units called "biomes," regions throughout the world classified according to physical features, including temperature, rainfall, and type of vegetation. Another fundamental concept in geology is "balance of nature," the natural process of birth, reproduction, eating

and being eaten, which keeps animal/plant communities fairly stable. Other key concepts include imbalances, energy, nutrients, population growth, diversity, habitat, competition, predation, parasitism, adaptation, coevolution, succession and climax communities, and conservation.

Key Assumptions Ecologists Make: Ecologists take for granted

- that patterns exist within animal/plant communities
- that these communities should be studied and classified
- that animals and plants often depend on one another and modify one another
- that balance must be maintained within ecosystems.

Implications of Ecology: The study of ecology leads to numerous implications for life on earth. By studying balance of nature, for example, we can see when nature is out of balance, as in the current “population explosion,” and begin to reverse the population problem. We can see how pesticides, designed to kill pests on farm crops, also lead to the harm of mammals and birds, either directly or indirectly, through food webs. We also can learn how over-farming causes erosion and depletion of soil nutrients.

The Point of View of Ecologists: Ecologists look at plants and animals and see them functioning in relationship with one another within their habitats, and needing to be in balance for the earth to be healthy and sustainable.

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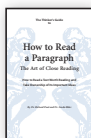
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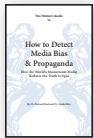
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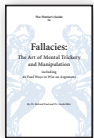
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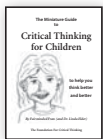
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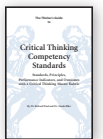
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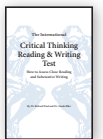
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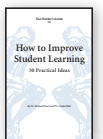
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