Essay 1: Why Read?

When was the last time you read a book that changed your life?
When was the last time you read a book?
When was the last time you read?
When was the last time you read something that changed your life?

The following essay and its corresponding assignment will serve as an introduction to English 28 as well as the subject of English. Even though there are only a few of you that may consider majoring in English, the above questions are less a measure of your subject proficiency (or interest) than they are an exploration into a critical and intimate relationship with language.

For this essay, you will be asked to explore the question: what is the importance of reading and writing?

In order to do so, you will be required to read four essays:

- Gregory Currie – “Does Great Literature Make Us Better”
- Annie Murphy Paul – “Reading Literature Makes Us Smarter and Nicer”
- Patricia Viera – “Literature Matters: does reading make you smarter?”

As you read these essays, you will be given a variety of exercises that will encourage you to practice: active reading, comprehension, and response. These will serve as the foundation for most of your future writing assignments and will allow you to both see and participate within the given conversation.

Exercise 1: Annotating (Interrogating) Your Texts

As an "active reader," you already know that when you read textbook assignments, you should have questions in your mind. As you read, you should be looking for the answers to these questions. You should also have a pencil in hand so that you can annotate your text. Annotating something simply means, "making notes" on it.

Unlike highlighting, which is a passive activity, the process of annotating text helps you to stay focused and involved with your text. You'll find that the process of taking notes as you read will help you to concentrate better. It will also help you to monitor and improve your comprehension. If you come across something that you don't understand or that you need to ask you instructor about, you'll be able to quickly make note of it, and then go on with your reading.

You can annotate in any way you feel most comfortable. Many find it most useful to annotate directly onto a text – by underlining and using a system of coded symbols. For example you can use stars to mark key ideas, question marks to indicate something you don’t understand, asterisks to mark evidence for a writer’s claims, exclamation points to indicate places where claims are made. You can write questions for yourself, and circle words you do not know to remind yourself to look them up later. You can of course annotate without marking in your book, but this requires a little more work on your part because you will have to copy these ideas, claims etc. directly into a notebook.

The following is a list of some techniques that you can use to annotate text.
• Underline important terms.
• Write key words and definitions in the margin.
• Signal where important information can be found with key words or symbols in the margin.
• Write short summaries in the margin at the end of sub-units.
• Write the questions in the margin.
• Indicate steps in a process by using numbers in the margin.
• Identify words and concepts that you don't know/understand.
• Pick out a main idea/theme from the text. (ex: race, disability, gender)
• Keep track of your thoughts and feelings at that moment in the text. (ex: Junior is making fun of himself a lot, that makes me uncomfortable)
• Identify recurring characteristics. (ex: Junior focuses a lot on external appearance)
• Help you remember concepts and passages from the text that you later want to explore in your own writing. (ex: physical violence’s role within the story)
• A way to quickly find quotes that you want to cite within a paper.
• Highlight areas that you want to further discuss in class or questions that you may have about the text for the professor or classmates.

Active Reading Strategies

Choose the strategies that work best for you or that best suit your purpose. You do not need to use them all, but you should use at least one every time you read.

• Ask yourself pre-reading questions. What is the topic, and what do you already know about it? Why has the instructor assigned this reading at this point in the semester?
• Identify and define any unfamiliar terms.
• Bracket the main idea or thesis of the reading, and put an asterisk next to it. Pay particular attention to the introduction or opening paragraphs to locate this information.
• Put down your highlighter. Make marginal notes or comments instead. Every time you feel the urge to highlight something, write instead. You can summarize the text, ask questions, give assent, protest vehemently. You can also write down key words to help you recall where important points are discussed. Above all, strive to enter into a dialogue with the author.
• Write questions in the margins, and then answer the questions in a reading journal or on a separate piece of paper. If you’re reading a textbook, try changing all the titles, subtitles, sections and paragraph headings into questions.
• Make outlines, flow charts, or diagrams that help you to map and to understand ideas visually.
• Read each paragraph carefully and then determine "what it says" and “what it does.” Answer “what it says” in only one sentence. Represent the main idea of the paragraph in your own words. To answer “what it does,” describe the paragraph’s purpose within the text, such as “provides evidence for the author's first main reason” or “introduces an opposing view.”
• Write a summary of an essay or chapter in your own words. Do this in less than a page. Capture the essential ideas and perhaps one or two key examples. This approach offers a great way to be sure that you know what the reading really says or is about.
• Write your own exam question based on the reading.
• Teach what you have learned to someone else! Research clearly shows that teaching is one of the most effective ways to learn. If you try to explain aloud what you have been studying, (1) you’ll transfer
the information from short-term to long-term memory, and (2) you’ll quickly discover what you understand — and what you don’t.

Exercise 2: Summary, Paraphrase, Quotation

This exercise involves reading, which, if done actively, can help you learn about writing itself. Keep up with the way you respond to the essays as you read and study them (through the use of annotation and/or note-taking). Mark phrases or images that strike you as interesting or important in some way. Think about the way the writer(s) language conveys ideas. But most important, record your thoughts about what you are reading. Make marginal notes, ask questions—annotate, annotate, annotate. Remember, you are trying to discover what the essay is saying, and how it is saying it (and perhaps why).

Then complete the following:

Write summaries of all four essays. Remember, a summary presents the main essence of the original essay, which will include the essay’s controlling idea as well as its supporting ideas. Remember that a summary does not focus on the specific details, the anecdotal, nor does it include your opinion.

Paraphrase one of each essay’s most critical passages (this will be subjective; I assign this knowing different students will choose different passages). Your paraphrase should be shorter than the passage you select. Include this paraphrase in your summaries and mark it with italics.

Also include one quote that you think is most striking and relevant within the summary. Make certain you use correct MLA citation.

Completion of this assignment is required to complete the Why Read? Block. Each summary should not exceed 200 words per.

You do not need a works cited for this assignment. We will work on that later. Just put each speech’s summary on its own page in your word doc and title it accordingly.

Hint: to complete this summary, remember to think about what the writer was trying to say. To do this, go through the piece, paragraph by paragraph, and figure out what the main point of that particular paragraph is. Write this down. Once you have figured out what all the paragraphs are saying then try to write, in your own words, how they all "go together." Things you might want to think about include: What was the writer saying, overall? What were the main points the writer used to support his or her idea?

Exercise 3: Entering the Conversation

For this exercise, you will respond to the statements and claims being made by the source material that has been provided for you in order to announce your own perspective on the topic.
Up to this point, you have read four different voices within a conversation about whether reading “literature” is important. It is now time for you to find your own position within the conversation.

In order for you to form your own claim in a manner that suits the conversation already taking place, you should go back and reread the essays and your own exercises up to this point. Once you have reminded yourself of the key points, you will need to form your own perspective on the topic. In order to do so, you will need to provide sufficient evidence to support your claims.

Some questions to consider:
- Do you think that reading literature is important? Why/Why Not?
- Do you have any experience with reading that supports your answer for the above question?
- What was the last book you read? What did you learn?

You do not have to answer each of these questions, but you should use them to help guide your response.

This exercise needs to be 1-2 pages. You should provide a clear thesis statement that illustrates your stance on the topic and body paragraphs that support your thesis. Completion of this exercise is required to complete the Why Read? Block.

**Essay 1: Why Read? Why Write?**

For this essay, you will compose an argument based on whether or not you think reading “literature” (or reading the written word in general) is important. In short, you will compose an argument-based essay that argues whether or not it is important to read “literature.” You will need to compare/contrast the various ideas proposed in the assigned articles and your own stance on the topic. Your essay should argue your position, not merely be a place to reiterate the claims already made in the essays I have provided for you.

For this argument, you will need to provide information about the conversation that is taking place in the essays we have read (context). You will also need to support your claims with specific evidence and support that makes sense to your audience.

Some questions to consider:
- What is your opinion on whether reading “literature” is important? Why?
- Have you or someone you know learned anything from reading? What did you learn? How?
- What particular “literature” have you read? Do you think your background with certain texts may affect the way you approach the topic?

Requirements:
- This essay should be 2-3 pages in length. Double Spaced. MLA Format w/ Works Cited. The Works Cited page does not count towards the page limit.
- This essay should utilize at least two (2) quotes from at least two (2) of the required reading and illustrate a sufficient understanding of the pre-existing conversation.
- This essay should have a compelling thesis statement that is on topic with the prompt and supported through body paragraphs.
- You will need to upload the “Composed” Draft of your Essay on your class website.
- All Exercises associated with Essay Block need to be completed and turned in (even if they are late).

You may use any information you have already written for your exercises. In fact, I encourage you to do so. But keep in mind that this essay is asking you to compose a specific argument. While the information you have already written for your exercises are relevant, you will have to make some alterations to how they are included in order to address the prompt. In other words, do not just cut and paste.