

Introduction

What is Mindful Reading?

Before we get to **mindful reading**, let's answer what at first might seem like the simpler question: What is reading? Reading is something we all do every day—we read books, street signs, text messages, blogs, product labels, billboards—but have you ever stopped to think about what happens when we read? How does your brain process the marks your eyes see? How are these marks understood as letters, words, and sentences that have meaning? Research has shown that when we read, different regions and systems in the brain play different roles. Neuroscientists at Princeton University, Tanja Kassuba and Sabine Kastner, explain that the visual system and language regions of the brain work together to translate the marks we see on a page into words we can understand. Did you know that our eyes hardly move as they do all of this work? We might think that as we read our eyes move smoothly along the words as we read them, but, instead, our eyes remain largely motionless since eyes can only see when they are in this state. Between these motionless periods, our eyes move very rapidly, jumping along the lines, again with little reference to the words before us (Rayner).

Cognitive psychologists, who research the brain, have conducted various experiments to study the power of reading. For example, in his book *Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction*, Keith Oatley argues that reading fiction (stories) provides such a vivid simulation of real life that the brain processes a detailed description of an experience one may find in a novel in the same way it would process the actual experience. Equally interesting is that Raymond A. Mar and his colleagues, including Oatley, conducted experiments that ultimately showed that people who read fiction are more empathetic than those who do not. Mar and his colleagues argue that this is the case because fiction offers the unique opportunity to identify with characters, something that fiction readers take with them beyond the text and into real life situations.

As these brain studies suggest, reading can be an escape into another world that often seems as real as the one around you. But not all reading is peppered with colorful characters and exciting scenes. While you may end up reading some fiction in your English classes, you will likely read a lot of textbooks in college, too. Of course, this kind of reading is not intended to send you into another world, but meant to inform you or teach you something in a more straightforward manner. Fiction and textbooks won't be the only reading you'll do in college. You may also be asked to read difficult peer-reviewed articles, dense scientific reports, business memoranda, and editorials, among other

kinds of texts. You will, therefore, need to figure out how to move among all of the different types of texts you will encounter and how to adjust your approach so you can get the most out of each text.

This is where the “mindful” in “mindful reading” comes in. If you have heard the word “mindful” it may have been in a different context, perhaps in reference to meditation, yoga, or Buddhism. When you are mindful you are “in the moment.” You are not distracted or focused on anything else. Being mindful is a pretty tall order when there is so much around to distract us—smartphones ringing, text messages buzzing, screens blinking. Still, practicing mindful reading by being aware of how you read can help you develop as a reader and—by extension—as a writer. Reading mindfully means paying attention not just to the content of the text—what it says—but rather to the process of reading itself by adjusting how you read based on what the piece asks of you. Skimming something—a newspaper, perhaps—may be a perfectly suitable approach in a particular situation. Skimming, however, might not be the best approach when you are expected to answer specific questions about a more complex reading or connect it to other complex readings, as you will likely have to do in your college classes.

Mindful reading acts as a framework that is intended to remind you of the importance of becoming an active reader who makes careful and deliberate decisions about the reading strategies you might use. As you mindfully read, you will be learning about reading and also about yourself as a reader. These experiences can help you become an altogether stronger reader not just in this course but beyond it.

How this Book Enriches and Expands Your Reading Ability

“But,” you may say, “I know how to read! I wouldn’t have made it this far if I didn’t.” You are right—to an extent. You certainly know how to decode language in the ways reading is described in the opening to this introduction, and you can understand certain types of texts. But, in college, expectations change, including those associated with reading. You will need to work on your reading for several reasons:

1. You will be faced with more reading.
2. The types of reading you will be assigned will vary drastically depending on the discipline and the course.
3. You will be expected to read more complex texts.
4. You will be asked to complete more complex tasks associated with your reading.

These reasons suggest why it is important that you gain practice in different reading strategies.

As you move through your academic career you will likely find (if you haven't already) that texts from different disciplines demand different types of reading. While you may be used to reading literature in a certain way, that reading approach might not lend itself to that dense biological research study you have been assigned to read. Or, you may find that your go-to reading strategy of highlighting with that yellow marker might not cut it when faced with a jargon-ridden historical essay meant only for expert historians or that equally (but for different reasons) difficult psychology textbook. *A Writer's Guide to Mindful Reading* seeks to prepare you for all of these reading experiences by helping you develop a repertoire or toolkit of reading strategies to which you can turn so you are prepared to effectively read a range of texts as you move through the disciplines.

Although you may be using this textbook in an English or writing course, these reading strategies are useful across disciplines. In fact, I taught one student who regularly spoke about how becoming aware of and practicing various reading approaches within the mindful reading framework helped him to understand word problems in math class (math!). In an evaluation of one of my courses, another student described his use of the "Says/Does" approach in a History course. This reading strategy, which you will learn about in Chapter 2, involves going paragraph by paragraph noticing what each paragraph says—its content—and what each does—its function. The student explains, "In American Studies, I decided to try the 'Says/Does' approach when reading the Dred Scott case proved difficult due to its word choice. Breaking it down paragraph by paragraph proved very useful. If I see another cryptic piece in further history classes, I would return to the method."

Further developing your reading abilities is important work as recent studies have shown that college students and young adults, generally, struggle in this area. A study entitled "America's Skills Challenge: Millennials and the Future," published in 2015 by Educational Testing Services (ETS) found that "one half (50%) of America's millennials," defined as those born after 1980 who were 16–34 years of age in 2012 "failed to reach level 3 in literacy" (11), which tests how well respondents "identify, interpret, or evaluate one or more pieces of information, and often require varying levels of inference" (48). In other words, it tests how well one reads. Only 50% of American millennials met this minimum benchmark, highlighting the difficulty young adults have working with "pieces of information," what we might call sources or informational texts, which make up a large part of college-level reading material. Additionally, the SAT Verbal/Critical Reading Portion, as well as the ACT test, which is also often used for admissions and placement have shown declines in students' reading abilities: "In 2015 [the date of the most recent published study], the average score on the SAT verbal test was near historic lows" (par. 3). Based on 1.9 million students who took the ACT test in 2015, 46% of students met ACT's "college ready benchmark" on the Reading section, a decline from the 51% who did so in 2006. Most recently, in late 2016, the Stanford History Education Group at

Stanford University published a study entitled “Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning,” which reports that middle-school through college-age students are “easily duped” when “it comes to evaluating information that flows through social media channels” (4). Accurately reading, understanding, evaluating, and incorporating credible information into one’s writing is, of course, an important aspect of college-level writing.

Despite these dismal statistics, and although you still have a lot to learn and practice, your previous reading experiences can be useful to your current, college-level reading assignments. Completing the following exercise will help you reflect on these earlier experiences.

Ponder This

Take a moment to think back to something that you recently chose to read, something easy that posed no problems for you—maybe a blog entry, a novel, a newspaper article. Jot down a few sentences about that experience. You probably didn’t think much about how you read it at the time, why you read it, or how you read it, especially if you chose it. The reading process likely never entered your mind. Now, think about something you read recently that you found was difficult—whether because of its vocabulary, its genre (i.e. the type of text it is), or its subject. Jot down a few sentences about that experience. I bet you became more self-conscious about your reading process. You may have decided to give up altogether or you might have used some strategies to help you work through the difficulty. You may have used a dictionary to help you understand some words or maybe you followed a hyperlink to another source hoping that would offer some guidance. These strategies are helpful, and they are ones that you may already have extensive practice using. This textbook will give you additional strategies, additional ways of reading, so that you never have to give up on a text, no matter how difficult, no matter the discipline, no matter the challenges that face you.

Won’t This Kind of Reading Take Longer?

Now that you know that this textbook will give you strategies for reading and encourage you to take time to reflect on—think about—your reading, you are probably wondering: “Won’t this kind of

reading take longer than just reading?” The answer is “not necessarily.” Here’s why: When you are reading mindfully and in the present moment, you realize immediately when you begin to zone out and you consider what you can do in that moment to refocus. You ask yourself questions about why your mind drifted. Perhaps you need a different reading strategy—one that will make the reading more relevant or comprehensible. And yes, it may take a minute to regroup, shift gears, and put another strategy into play, but you won’t lose the time you would have lost had it taken you 15 minutes (and 8 pages!) to realize that you zoned out and have no idea what you just read, an experience we have all had.

At first, being mindful may seem unnatural and even tedious at times. You may wonder, “Why can’t I JUST read without doing all of this extra work?” Here’s why: Research shows that in order to **transfer**—or apply—what is learned in one course to another, students need to actively think about—or reflect on—what they have learned. In other words, they need to be mindful. If students simply go through the motions and complete assignments and readings without any awareness of them and their uses beyond the present class, students are not likely to draw on those earlier educational experiences when faced with similar experiences later in their academic careers and beyond. So, taking the time to reflect on what you are learning about reading and about yourself as a reader as you move through the selections in this book will save you time later since it will position you to apply all that you learn here to other courses and contexts. This reflective work will allow you to more easily see connections between the activities and assignments included in this book and those you will encounter outside of this course. Plus, the truth is that it is impossible to “just” read. Whether or not you pay close attention to the reading process, you are still unconsciously making decisions when you read. You are choosing to pay closer attention to certain parts of the text, you are slowing down in some moments, speeding up at others, maybe skipping some parts altogether. This textbook is simply asking you to become more aware of those habits and strategies; it’s enriching and adding to them; and it’s positioning you to consciously bring them with you to courses and contexts beyond this class.

Speaking of how this work can help you beyond your present course and even beyond school altogether, students in my classes regularly mention how what they learn about reading helps them “read” the world around them. One student explained that just as she was expected to read different viewpoints on the same topic, she now “watch[es] both NBC and Fox to get different perspectives.” At first glance this example may not seem to have anything to do with reading, but the student is describing how she reads these perspectives in relation to each other, recognizing that each has its own biases. This student will not simply accept what she hears or reads, but will deliberately consider and compare that information to other ideas and perspectives she encounters. That consciousness, that awareness, is what mindful reading seeks to foster.

What is “Academic Writing”?

So far, this book has talked a lot about reading as if forgetting that it is a “writer’s” guide to mindful reading. This has probably left you wondering, “What kind of writing will we be doing?” This book engages you in what is often called academic writing. You might think about academic writing as an ongoing scholarly conversation. In fact, it has become common to use philosopher and rhetorician Kenneth Burke’s description of a conversation as a metaphor for academic writing:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally’s assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

I bet if you take a few minutes you can come up with an instance in which you walked into a room—like the parlor above—to find a conversation already in progress. Maybe this happened to you at work or at lunch with friends. You arrived to see that folks were already well into a discussion. You likely didn’t jump right in, but, instead, you took a minute or two to get a sense of the conversation, what they were talking about, and who was saying what. Only then—after listening and evaluating the situation—did you participate. In the “conversation” of academic writing, you will be expected to do precisely that, which you have likely already done many times in your life. You will need to “listen for a while” to what others have said about the subject until you “[catch] the tenor of the argument,” to use Burke’s words. Ultimately, you will have to contribute something to the discussion; you will have to “put in your oar” so to speak. But it doesn’t end there. You will then need to address how others respond to your contribution and you may need to qualify or revise it. Others will likely respond again, you will do the same, and so on. In less metaphorical terms, many of the writing assignments in this book expect you to read (and understand) what others have said about a subject before you can think alongside them and write a response or develop an argument.

The Importance of Annotation to Academic Writing

Annotation, marking up a text, is a first step toward participating in academic conversations. When you annotate, you write as you read by responding to that reading in the form of notes, comments, and questions in the margins of your text. This may be done digitally or by hand. These marginal notes represent the initial ways in which you are participating in the scholarly conversation with the author of the text. Your initial contributions to the conversation can be expanded to help you develop more detailed responses in the form of longer, more formal writing assignments, which will likely demand that you qualify and revise those responses as you continue to participate in scholarly conversations. Because annotation requires that you write as you read, it might be thought of as a bridge between those two practices. In fact, research has shown that simultaneous practice in reading and writing leads to stronger abilities in both.

Digitally Annotating the Selections in this Textbook

Annotations can be handwritten on a printed text or applied digitally on an electronic text. Many of the reading selections in this textbook are from *The Best of Technology Writing* series. You are encouraged to access these through the links provided after the introduction to each reading selection. The University of Michigan Press, which hosts *The Best of Technology Writing* series, offers a free annotation tool that you can use to make and share annotations. Here are directions for doing so:

1. Click on the link that will take you to the correct volume of *The Best of Technology Writing*. That link appears just after the introduction to the reading selection. Open the reading selection you would like to read in *The Best of Technology Writing* and notice the two icons—one that looks like an eye (the highlighting tool) and one that looks like a piece of paper (the notation tool)—on the top right-hand side of the page.
2. Click on the icon that looks like a piece of paper.
3. You will be prompted to create a free account; do so.
4. Once you have a free account you will have the ability to annotate the text using a digital highlighter and sticky notes.
5. Use the highlighting tool (the icon that looks like an eye) to highlight the relevant words and then you will be prompted to annotate. If you click “annotate” a text box will appear. Once you post your comment in that box it will be attached to the highlighted portion.
6. You may share the document with the annotations and you may decide for each annotation if it will be visible just to you or made public.

For those readings that are not part of *The Best of Technology Writing* series, you have several options for digitally annotating them, including the following:

1. You may use the Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is available for free download at <https://get.adobe.com/reader>. This program will allow you to highlight and add sticky notes to any of the readings printed in the textbook. You can save your documents with the notes and share them.
2. You may download an annotation management system like Diggo for free at <https://www.diigo.com>. The basic, free service will allow you to annotate up to 100 webpages and PDFs.
3. You may add sticky notes to any webpage with <https://www.mystickies.com>. You will need to sign up (it's free) and install a Chrome Browser extension.

Reading and Writing to Make Meaning

Notice that throughout this introduction, both reading and writing are described as active, creative practices. This textbook imagines reading as an exercise in *creating* meaning, not *finding* it. Take a minute to consider the difference between the acts of creating and finding. Conceiving of reading as *finding* meaning suggests that the text holds the meaning and it is the reader's job to simply locate the meaning therein rather than take part in how the text's meaning is created. When we think about reading as an act of creation, we might imagine a reader who brings her background, previous reading experiences, culture, religion, and worldview with her to the reading. All of this contributes to how that reader creates meaning from the text. Think about it this way: If meaning was located (or hidden) in a text then each time you read that text it would mean the same thing to you. Every reading experience of the text would be exactly the same. This isn't the case, though. Have you ever read a story when you were much younger and returned to it a decade later to find that it means something different to you? The story hasn't changed; it's you who has changed! That change affects how you make or create meaning from the story. Sometimes, unfortunately, that change means that you end up disliking a book you once loved or it could mean the opposite and you end up loving a book you couldn't stand as a youngster. Neuroscientist Richard Restak explains this phenomenon as follows: "As a result of the lifetime plasticity of the brain, we're literally a different person than the person who read the book the first time." No matter the kind of feelings that the act of rereading may evoke, this very scenario—that texts mean differently to us at different times—demonstrates that the reader and the text *create meaning together*.

Along the same lines, you will likely notice that as you participate in class discussions about the

reading selections in this book, your classmates may have noticed different elements than you. They may think the piece means something different. They are not wrong. The selection does mean differently to them because their reading experience has been different from yours. Because of qualities they bring to the text—their background, previous reading experiences, culture, religion, world-view, and so on—they paid attention to different aspects of the text and so came away with different understandings of it. That's not to say that anything goes when reading since the text must support all readings, but rather that meaning does not reside in the text alone.

How This Book Is Organized

By way of conclusion, this section provides an overview of how *A Writer's Guide to Mindful Reading* is organized. The book is divided into two parts with Chapter 5 (in Part Two) serving as a bridge between them. Part One includes the instructional apparatus: it teaches you about the reading strategies, provides writing instruction; and explains multimodal composing. Entitled “Readings on Reading,” Chapter 5 is comprised of selections on the subject of reading, which will support your understanding of the very concept of reading and set you on a path toward becoming a more reflective reader. All of the readings in Chapters 6-10 address technology and its relationship to some other idea or concept (e.g. Gender and Technology) and are accompanied by questions and long writing assignments. These assignments will help you understand, respond to, and synthesize the readings, as well as apply ideas and concepts within them. Parts One and Two, however, are not totally distinct. As you are asked to complete the assignments throughout Part Two, you are directed to the chapter in Part One that can help you complete each assignment. For example, if an assignment asks you to complete a rhetorical reading, a link in that assignment provides the chapter number from Part One in which rhetorical reading is described. As you move between the two parts of this book, learning and applying the reading strategies while writing in response to the included readings, you will become that mindful reader who is prepared to engage the range of texts you will encounter as a college student and beyond. To further support your understanding of the terms and concepts associated with mindful reading, a glossary is included at the end of this textbook. Words that appear in boldface throughout this textbook are included in that glossary.

A Note about Accessibility

This textbook strives to be accessible to a diverse readership by offering a flexible user experience.

The textbook is available in different formats, including ePub. In addition, the textbook contains a navigable table of contents, is searchable, and allows viewers to adjust the size of the text and other textual elements using the “zoom” feature while reading. As explained in Chapter 2, the “read aloud and paraphrase” reading strategy can be modified for deaf readers. Please contact the publisher with any additional questions about accessibility.

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For Further Reading

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