



# Classroom Activities: *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading*

Created by Samantha Hedges and Joshua Kieffer

After students have read and discussed chapters 5-12, have them complete these activities. The activities are specific to *How to Read a Book* but can be adapted to accompany any text, whether a book, essay, or news article.

## Activity 1: Coming to Terms with an Author

The authors describe a term as a “skilled use of words for the sake of communicating knowledge” (p. 98). To understand a book or any piece of writing, the reader and the author must understand the important words used in the piece of writing—they must come to terms. Instruct students to follow the steps below to come to terms with the author. If students require help coming up with terms (the important words used by the author), you can provide them with examples such as “analytic,” “knowledge,” “inspectional,” etc. The sections of chapter 8 titled “finding the key words” (p. 100) and “finding the meanings” (p. 106) will also help them find terms and determine their meaning.

1. **Read chapter 8, “Coming to Terms with an Author.”**
2. **Identify the key terms.** Draw three columns on a piece of paper. In the first column, list the important terms the author uses.
3. **Write out the definitions of the key terms.** In the second column, write the definition of each term or what you think the terms mean.
4. **Come to terms with the author.** In the third column, write the definition of each term according to the author. Think: Do your definitions match? To come to terms with an author, you must understand how they define the terms; go back and reread how they use the terms until you understand how they define them.

## Activity 2: Determine the Author’s Message

Propositions in a book express the author’s judgement about something or a declaration of knowledge. Authors put forth propositions to affirm something they think to be true or deny something they think to be false. Instruct students to follow the steps below to pick out the important sentences in chapter 9, identify the prepositions of the sentences, and construct an argument from the sentences. If students are struggling to locate the important sentences and propositions, direct them to sections “finding the key sentences” (p. 119) and “finding the propositions” (p. 123) of chapter 9.

1. **Read chapter 9, “Determining an Author’s Message.”**
2. **Write the important sentences and their propositions.** Write the five most important sentences in chapter 9. Write the propositions of these sentences. If you are struggling, think back to the classroom discussion about the book: The authors aimed to answer questions by writing this book, and the propositions are the answers to those questions.
3. **Construct an argument.** Put these sentences in a sequential order that constructs an argument with which you think the authors would agree.

### Activity 3: Criticizing a Text Fairly

The authors' claim: to agree or disagree with a book, you must first understand the book. One way to show you understand a book is to state the position of the author in your own words. Instruct students to complete the following task to determine if they understand the points the authors are trying to make, then have them state, using facts and reason, whether they agree or disagree with the authors and why by following these steps.

1. **Read chapter 10, "Criticizing a Book Fairly."**
2. **Show you understand the chapter.** Write a one-page essay describing what the chapter is about.
3. **Agree or disagree with the author.** Then using facts and reason, write a one-page essay describing whether you agree or disagree with the authors and why.

### Activity Extension

These discussion questions and activities introduce students to reading books and other written material intelligently and understanding what a book intends to teach. The analytic skills utilized to read also apply to engaging in productive dialogue. To practice applying these skills to dialogue, have students complete the activities of the companion guide: "Applying the Rules of Analytic Reading to Dialogue."