



Prerequisites

The authors describe four levels of reading: elementary, inspectional, analytic, and syntopic. The higher goal set forth by the authors is for readers to understand what they read by learning and applying the fundamentals of analytic reading. Thus, this guide focuses on analytic reading, which assumes a basic grasp of the two prior levels: elementary and inspectional. Teachers should read or skim the first four chapters (pages 3-44) to decide whether students have a basic grasp of the elementary and inspectional reading levels. If they do not, teachers can utilize the first four chapters to get ideas for how to help your students achieve readiness for analytic reading.

This discussion guide and the classroom activities cover chapters 5-12 (pp. 45 - 185). Refer students to chapters 13-19 (pp. 187-298) if they want to learn how to read specific types of books, such as history, philosophy, and imaginative literature. Refer to chapter 20 if you want to teach, or your students want to learn, the highest level of reading: syntopic reading.

Be a Demanding Reader (Chapter 5)

Reading a book is a conversation between the reader and the author, and to read for understanding you must be a demanding reader. To be a demanding reader and learn something from a book, readers should be active readers, asking questions of the book.

Demanding readers ask and answer four central questions about any book:

1. What is the book about as a whole?
2. What is being said by the author(s) in detail, and how?
3. Is the book true, in whole or part?
4. What is the significance of the book?

To keep track of the answers to these questions, demanding readers mark up the book, such as by underlining important sentences, starring key arguments, and circling key terms. Marking up the book helps you stay awake, express what you are thinking and what you know, and remember the thoughts of the author. Marking up the book also helps you keep track of your differences and agreements with the author. See pages 48-52—the sections titled “How to Make a Book Your Own” and “The Three Kinds of Note-making”—to instruct your students on different markings and when to use them.

Analytic Reading (stages listed on pages 161-162)

Analytic reading is the mechanism for being a demanding reader and is the “ideal performance” of a reader. The three stages of analytic reading are outlined below. The four questions above and the three stages of analytic reading are embedded in the discussion questions and activities of this guide.

1st stage: Comprehension - Rules for finding what the book is about (ch. 6-7)

1. Classify the book according to kind (instructional, fiction, etc.) and subject (pp. 59-74).
2. State what the whole book is about (pp. 78-83).
3. List the major parts in their order and relation to one another and outline these parts to outline the whole book (pp. 83-90).
4. Define the problem or problems the author has tried to solve (pp. 92-93).

2nd stage: Interpretive - Rules for interpreting a book's contents (ch. 8-9)

1. Come to terms with the author by interpreting the key words (pp. 96-112).
2. Grasp the author's leading arguments by examining the most important sentences (pp. 119-127).
3. Know the author's arguments by finding them in sequences of sentences or constructing them out of sequences of sentences (pp. 127-133).
4. Determine which problems the author has solved, and which they have not. For the problems the author has not solved, decide which the author knew they had failed to solve (pp. 133-134).

3rd stage: Critical - Rules for criticizing a book as a communication of knowledge (ch. 10-12)

1. Do not begin criticism until you have completed your outline and your interpretation of the book (pp. 140-144). (Do not say you agree, disagree, or suspend judgement, until you can say "I understand" the book.)
2. Do not disagree contentiously—be charitable to the author and humble in your disagreement (pp. 144-149). See the "HxA Way" for recommended norms of disagreement, and general guidance on civil discourse.
3. Demonstrate that you recognize the difference between knowledge and mere opinion by presenting good reasons for any critical judgement you make (pp. 150-161).

This last rule for criticism includes four special criteria. Of these four, the first three are criteria for disagreement. If the reader cannot show any of these four criteria, the reader must say they agree with the author. But, regarding the fourth criteria, if the reader determines the author's analysis or account is incomplete, they cannot say they agree or disagree; therefore, they must suspend judgement.

1. Show wherein the author is uninformed
2. Show wherein the author is misinformed.
3. Show wherein the author is illogical.
4. Show wherein the author's analysis or account is incomplete.

Discussion Questions

These discussion questions apply the three stages of analytic reading. For each discussion question, sub-questions may be listed to help answer the primary question, which is directly related to the stages of analytic reading. The primary questions may be applied to any book; the sub-questions are specific to *How to Read a Book*.

Suggested Format for Discussion

Before discussing the book, set up your classroom to model a Socratic seminar. In Socratic seminars, the desks are in a circle or U-shape. The teacher may pose questions, but they are not the center of questioning. A successful seminar involves students asking questions of each other with the teacher only stepping in as facilitator to pose focus questions and to bring the discussion back to the book if it veers off course.

Comprehension Questions

1. What kind of book is this?
 - a. Is *How to Read a Book* a practical work or a theoretical work?
 - b. What category of science or art does *How to Read a Book* fall into?
2. In two to three sentences, what is this book about?
 - a. Other than “books” and “reading,” what are the main subjects of *How to Read a Book*?
 - b. For what audience is *How to Read a Book* written?
3. What are the major parts or sections of the book?
4. What problems were the authors aiming to solve by writing this book? What questions did they aim to answer by writing this book?

Interpretive Questions

1. What are the author’s most important sentences? What leading arguments do they reveal?
 - a. For example: “Not simply by following an author’s arguments, but only by meeting them as well, can the reader ultimately reach significant agreement or disagreement with his author.” What is the leading argument in this sentence?
2. What is the overall argument of the book? How do the most important sentences build together to support it?
3. Does the overall argument solve the problems or answer the questions the authors had in mind while writing? Did the authors know whether they found these solutions and answers or not?

Critical Questions

1. What information is the author missing?
2. Does the author rely on any incorrect information? If so, what?
3. Does the author commit any logical fallacies? (do their conclusions follow logically from their premises? Or do they assert things that are contradictory?)
4. Is the author’s analysis complete? After reading the text, can you say “I understand” the text? What does it mean to say you understand?

Book Discussion Extension

Students can practice applying the principles outlined in *How to Read a Book* by completing the activities based on the book, then completing the activities that apply the principles of the book to dialogue. Both sets of activities are included in this packet.