

# What is "Active Reading"?

**The Goal of Active Reading: To own what you read.**

## **Objectives:**

- To have ideas and opinions about a reading;
- To retrieve information quickly;
- To organize information from the reading;
- To increase comprehension, vocabulary, analytical and evaluation skills, links with what a reader already knows, long term memory;
- To improve working knowledge of the literal aspects of a work;
- To allow readers to deepen original ideas;
- To help the reader inductively discover the meaning of a work and to have stated it in his own words;
- To find the purpose the author had in writing the work;
- To provide ideas and questions for class discussion;
- To have a conversation with an author
- To think as one reads

## **HERE'S HOW (IN GENERAL)**

Generally, for Active Reading of **passages**, highlight, box, star, code, translate, paraphrase, summarize over or beside lines, sentences, and passages. On **pages**, write notes in margins, on bottoms, tops, or in corners and/or add post it notes to accommodate reader's notes. On **end flaps**, create titled lists and categories of information and collect information under these categories with quoted, key words from passages and the page # next to the quoted word (fuller notes will be on the entire quote in the reading)

## **HERE'S HOW (IN MORE DETAIL)**

Analyze, evaluate, speculate about the **title** before beginning to read and then come back to the title after reading and summarize its relevance – always write a sentence or so explaining its relevance to the theme or thesis of the story/article;

- Examine **chapter or section titles or headings** before, during, and after reading;
- Identify and comment on the **narration** – 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> person, why? Omniscient, dramatic, participating – why? Present tense? Past tense? Why? Formal or informal? Educated or not – why? Keep a section in the front of the book to add to a growing understanding of the narration, point of view, tone, and mood of the piece. Decide and write the author's purpose for this narrative choice.

- Analyze the **narrator as a character**, even in nonfiction works – decide and comment on why he is reliable and unreliable.
- Highlight or underline **important ideas**;
- Write **parallel lines** to the side of passages too long to highlight but which need emphasis;
- **Star** ideas of utmost importance;
- Circle and define unfamiliar **vocabulary words** or ones with archaic or unusual meanings;
- Cycle, box, or **color-code** with a highlighter groups or series of words that work together to develop an image, motif, theme, character, main idea, or some other element.
- Place post it notes as markers at the edge of the page with a note as to the significance of that page;
- Write **analytical notes, paraphrases, ideas in the margins** that will help the reader remember thoughts about the content of the page;
- Place a **post it note** on the page to write summaries, paraphrases, comments, analyses that will not fit in the margins;
- Write key words that identify a symbol, image, or other important idea in the **upper outside corner of pages** so that when the reader flips through the book, he easily sees what significant idea, etc, is on the page and which has been thoroughly noted in the text of the page;
- **Color code various elements of fiction**, tropes, images – what ever needs to be identified, collected, and traced throughout the book and then create a legend on the front flap of the book;
- Start **cross-referenced lists on the front and back pages** (or add larger post-it notes) – wherever there is space that list characters names, themes, images, metaphors, symbols, etc. For each, quote a key word and write the page number next to it. Cross-reference by highlighting the information on the actual page of text with more in-depth comments, etc.
- **Cross reference images, motifs, recurring important ideas**, etc. Start a list on an end flap that gives a title to the group, e.g., “Christian Imagery” pp. 6,9, 15, 80, 210, etc. On each page highlight and comment on the example itself.
- **Comment in the margins – react personally**, agree, disagree, compare or contrast to previous knowledge/ another book / ideas;
- Write **questions** about what is not understood
- **Predict** what might happen;
- **Speculate** – “What if the character had done...?” “What if the writer had been [different in some way]?”
- Identify, highlight, and comment on all explicit and implicit references to the **themes** or theses of the writing.

- **Paraphrase** all confusing poetic sentences, prose sentences, or passages.
- **Summarize** (always in your own words) paragraphs, passages, sections, chapters, etc., to make sure the text is really understood;
- **Fold pages** in certain ways to code important parts of the book –

## **HERE ARE SOME REMINDERS**

- Highlight sparingly – coloring the entire reading does not help important information to stand out;
- Cross reference – use end flaps to gather numerous page numbers with examples of the same technique or idea
- Create individual coding systems that work for the reader
- Remind oneself that active reading is a reader’s dialogue with the author;
- Standardize where various kinds of notes appear (bottom right, top right, etc.) so that a reader can easily retrieve information of a certain kind, i.e., plot summaries are under chapter headings or references to a character’s personality are at the bottom right of pages or highlighted in yellow, etc.
- Outlines, summaries, paraphrases are in the reader’s own words.

**For more information on Active Reading, you may want to read Mortimer J. Adler’s essay “How To Mark A Book.”** From *The Saturday Review of Literature*, July 6, 1940, pp. 11-12 Copyright 1940, The Sat. Review Co., Inc.; renewed 1967 Sat. Review, Inc.

**Example of how "Active Reading" texts might be evaluated by your instructor:**

**Evaluation for Summer ACTIVE READING class of \_\_\_\_\_**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Due date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Work:</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>Work:</b>	<b>total</b>
<p><b>Active Reading Evidence and/or Analytical notes:</b> highlight, box, star, code, translate, paraphrase, summarize over or beside lines, sentences, and key passages. On <b>book pages (or separate paper)</b>, write notes in margins, on bottoms, tops, or in corners and/or add post it notes to accommodate reader's notes. <b>paraphrases, ideas in the margins</b> help reader remember thoughts about the content of the page <b>Provide record of story line:</b> <b>NOTE:</b> Outlines, summaries, paraphrases are in the reader's own words. <b>(+6)</b></p>		<p><b>Active Reading Evidence and/or Analytical notes:</b> highlight, box, star, code, translate, paraphrase, summarize over or beside lines, sentences, and key passages. On <b>book pages (or separate paper)</b>, write notes in margins, on bottoms, tops, or in corners and/or add post it notes to accommodate reader's notes. <b>paraphrases, ideas in the margins</b> help reader remember thoughts about the content of the page <b>Provide record of story line:</b> <b>NOTE:</b> Outlines, summaries, paraphrases are in the reader's own words. <b>(+6)</b></p>	
<p>On end flaps or on separate sheets of paper, <b>create titled lists and categories of information</b> (key events, characters, important ideas, themes, vocabulary, symbols, imagery, motifs) and collect information under these categories w/ quoted, key words from passages and the page # next to quoted word. <b>(+6)</b></p>		<p>On end flaps or on separate sheets of paper, <b>create titled lists and categories of information</b> (key events, characters, important ideas, themes, vocabulary, symbols, imagery, motifs) and collect information under these categories w/ quoted, key words from passages and the page # next to quoted word. <b>(+6)</b></p>	
<p><b>Personal Commentary in margins or on separate sheets of paper:</b> agree, disagree, compare or contrast to previous knowledge/ another book / ideas; write <b>questions</b> about what is not understood; <b>Predict</b> what might happen; <b>Speculate</b> – "What if the character had done...?" <b>(+6)</b></p>		<p><b>Personal Commentary in margins or on separate sheets of paper:</b> agree, disagree, compare or contrast to previous knowledge/ another book / ideas; write <b>questions</b> about what is not understood; <b>Predict</b> what might happen; <b>Speculate</b> – "What if the character had done...?" <b>(+6)</b></p>	
<p><b>Parent/student signature verification (+2)</b></p>		<p><b>Parent/student signature verification (+2)</b></p>	

**Total:** \_\_\_\_\_/20 **Total:** \_\_\_\_\_/20

**Comments:**

