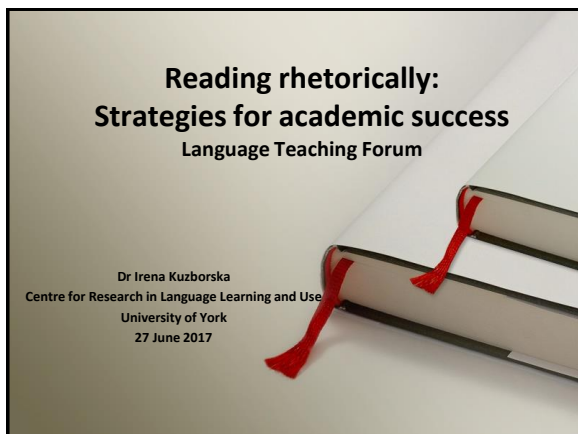


Reading rhetorically: Strategies for academic success


Language Teaching Forum

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In this workshop,

- I will introduce and explain how reading rhetorically can help develop reading and writing skills called for in university courses
- To achieve this, we will consider
 - characteristics of a good reader
 - rhetorical reading and its relationship with writing
 - evidence of how rhetorical reading leads to academic success
 - a teaching/learning technique of how to read rhetorically

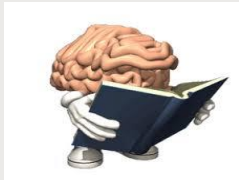
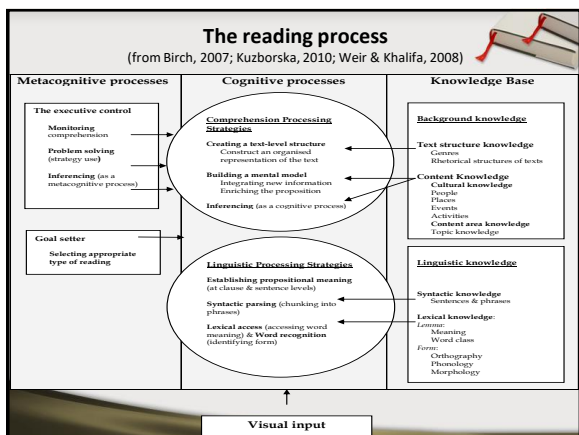


- What is reading? How does it work?

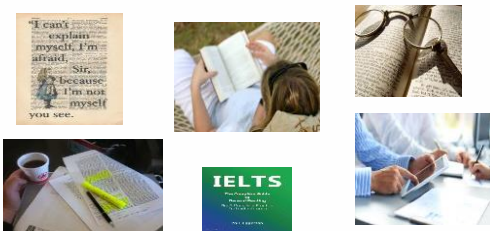
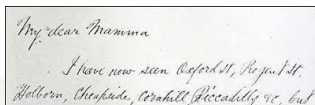


So, what is reading?

- Reading, in its broad sense, is defined as a combination of:
 - text input
 - appropriate cognitive processes
 - the information we already know (Grabe, 2009, p. 74)

What do good readers do when they read? Do they use all the processes?

Characteristics of a good reader



- Bean, Chappell, & Gillam (2014, p. 41):
 - ‘strong readers manage their reading processes according to the type of text they are reading and their purpose for reading it.’



Academic demands



- In an academic setting,
 - the integration of material from reading into writing is important (Kuzborska, 2015; Zhao & Hirvela, 2015)
- Bean et al (2014, p. 3):
 - In terms of reading, students are not only asked to find information but also ‘to find meaning’ and ‘to respond to that meaning’, e.g., *think like a geologist, a linguist, etc.*
 - In terms of writing, students are asked to write about their reading in a way that shows that they are ‘doing’ a discipline, e.g., *doing linguistics* or *doing geology*.

- Hyland (2009, p. 53) with regard to writing competence:

- ‘We can no longer regard a ‘good writer’ as someone who has control over the mechanisms of grammar, syntax and punctuation, as in the autonomous view of writing. Nor is it someone who is able to mimic expert composing ... practices by reworking their ideas during writing, as in process models. Instead, modern conceptions of literacy define an expert writer [and reader] as one who has attained **the local knowledge** that enables her to write [and read] as a **member of a discourse community**’ [my emphasis]



What is a discourse community?

- It is a group of people who
 - operate according to their own rules, conventions, paradigms of inquiry, and
 - use discourse **genres** that reflect and advance that inquiry.
 - **genres** (as texts) are used as **the means for** accomplishing specific social purposes & realising interpersonal relations (Swales, 1990; Hyland, 2009)



‘human authors behind texts’

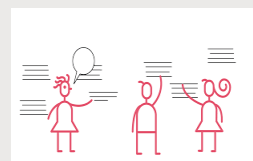
- **Genres** produced by discourse communities
 - contain NOT ONLY information BUT ALSO
 - reflect disciplinary traditions and traces of human voices
 - e.g., texts written by geologists draw on very different ways of presenting facts and evidence than those written by law specialists (Hyland, 2009, p. 34)
- THUS, reading in a discourse community involves not just
 - the interpretation of the text **BUT**
 - the interpretation of another person’s **worldview** (as presented by a text) and **an interaction** with that worldview (Bean et al, 2014; Zhao & Hirvela, 2015)



Dialogic nature of texts

- The view that reading and writing is an interaction between readers and writers
 - **emphasises the interaction with a text beyond just understanding what it says.**

- **What does that mean?**



Reading as part of conversation

- If you ask an experienced academic reader engaged in a research project **why she reads**, her answer may be something like this:
 - *'I'm investigating a problem that requires a close analysis of several primary sources. I also need to read secondary sources to see what other researchers are saying about this problem. Then I can position myself in the conversation'.*
- She says she is reading *'to position myself in the conversation'*.
 - **What does she mean by that?**
 - **How is reading part of a 'conversation'?**



Reading as joining a conversation

- To understand this,
 - think of writers as talking to readers &
 - think of readers as talking back.
- Leki (1993, p. 21) advises that:
 - a text should be viewed as a 'a partner in a dialogue, in a negotiation', where the other partner is the reader, each contributing to the dialogue.



Thinking of conversation as multi-voiced/ perspective taking

1. The first voice is that of the text's author;
2. A second voice (actually a set of voices) is the network of other writers the author refers to – previous participants in the conversation;
3. The third voice is the reader's as they respond to the text while they read, and later when they write something about it.



- Thinking of reading/writing as **joining a conversation**

will be helpful whenever students read or write so that they can consider not only the text they are reading, but also the conversation that the text joins.



- *So, what is a successful conversation in reading?*

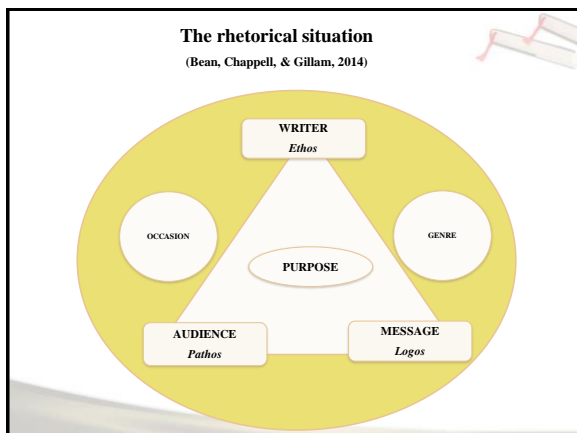
- The key to any effective communication, including communication in reading, is the consideration of the **rhetorical context**.



What is rhetoric?

Rhetoric is the art of **communication with an audience** using appropriate means in a given situation (Bean et al, 2014)





Reading rhetorically

- 'Rhetorical strategies take a step beyond the text itself. They are concerned with constructing a **rhetorical situation** for the text, trying to account for **author's purpose, context, and effect on the audience**. In rhetorical reading strategies readers use cues in the text, and their own knowledge of discourse situations, to recreate or infer **the rhetorical situation** of the text they are reading.' [my emphasis] (Haas & Flower, 1988, p. 176)

Using a text's social/historical context to make predictions about text

- Professor Lynn Weiner, a social historian, prepares to read a chapter entitled 'From the Medieval to the Modern Family' from Philippe Aries's *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, written in 1962.
 - 'This work isn't precisely in my field and it is a difficult text. I also know it by its reputation. But, like any student, I need to create a context in which to understand this work. When the book was written, the idea of studying the family was relatively new. Before this time historians often studied kings, presidents, and military leaders. That's why this new type of social history encouraged us to ask, 'How did ordinary people live? 'Not the kings, but the families in the middle ages. Then we have to ask: 'Which families is [Aries] talking about? What causes the change that he sees? ... For whom is the change significant?' ... I'll want to be careful not ... to assume the old family is bad and the new family is good. The title suggests a transition so I'll be looking for signs of it.' (Feldman, 1996, pp. 16-17, cited in Bean et al, 2014, p. 31).

Analysing purpose, audience, and genre

- Three factors, **purpose, audience, and genre**, create a 'rhetorical context'.
 - 'The more aware you are of these factors, the more effective you will be as a reader and the more effective you will be as a writer.' (Bean et al, 2014, p. 17)

Teaching how to read rhetorically

- **Asking students to write a rhetorical précis**
 - **Précis** means a concise summary
 - **A rhetorical précis** provides a structured model for
 - describing rhetorical strategies of a text,
 - capturing the gist of its content.

Road To Success

An example of a rhetorical précis

From Bean et al (2014, pp. 63-64):

- ¹A UC Berkeley Wellness Letter article, "Chew on This" (Feb. 2012), summarizes recent research on the possible benefits of gum-chewing and reports that so far, this research shows only small or brief benefits. ²The author notes first that gum-chewing may increase saliva flow that prevents cavities (but should not replace brushing and flossing), but then takes a "maybe" approach when reporting that gum-chewing's possible benefits for both weight maintenance and brain stimulation are limited and short-lived. ³The fact that this article fills the newsletter's customary spot for brief research reports establishes the author's purpose as informative, but its informal tone suggests that it is written to amuse as well as to inform. ⁴The author assumes an audience of well-educated readers who have high interest in health and wellness issues but a cautious attitude toward research findings, and thus is able to use a humorous tone as well as a clever, punning title that implicitly warns that what is being reported is something to "chew on" but not to be taken as certain.

Sentence 1

- ¹A UC Berkeley Wellness Letter article, “Chew on This” (Feb. 2012), summarizes recent research on the possible benefits of gum-chewing and reports that so far, this research shows only small or brief benefits.
 - Name of author, genre, and title of work, date in parentheses; a rhetorically accurate verb (such as *claims, argues, asserts, suggests*); and a ‘that’ clause containing the major assertion or thesis statement in the work

Sentence 2

- ²The author notes first that gum-chewing may increase saliva flow that prevents cavities (but should not replace brushing and flossing), but then takes a “maybe” approach when reporting that gum-chewing’s possible benefits for both weight maintenance and brain stimulation are limited and short-lived.
 - An explanation of how the author develops and supports the thesis, usually in chronological order

Sentence 3

- ³The fact that this article fills the newsletter’s customary spot for brief research reports establishes the author’s purpose as informative, but its informal tone suggests that it is written to amuse as well as to inform.
 - A statement of the author’s apparent purpose

Sentence 4

- ⁴The author assumes an audience of well-educated readers who have high interest in health and wellness issues but a cautious attitude toward research findings, and thus is able to use a humorous tone as well as a clever, punning title that implicitly warns that what is being reported is something to “chew on” but not to be taken as certain.
 - A description of the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience

Structure of a rhetorical précis

- **Sentence 1:** Name of author, genre, and title of work, date in parentheses; a rhetorically accurate verb (such as *claims, argues, asserts, suggests*); and a ‘that’ clause containing the major assertion or thesis statement in the work
- **Sentence 2:** An explanation of how the author develops and supports the thesis, usually in chronological order
- **Sentence 3:** A statement of the author’s apparent purpose
- **Sentence 4:** A description of the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience

Double awareness in reading rhetorically



- Analysing a text’s rhetorical context as students read will enable them to frame a response in terms of their own rhetorical context:
 - **What will be their purpose, audience, and genre?**
 - Students’ answers will influence not only what they write but also the way they read and use additional texts.
- **Reading rhetorically, thus, involves the awareness of both:**
 1. the purposes of the author whose text students are reading; the author’s intended audience within a specific context;
 2. students’ own purposes as readers and writers and their intended audience within a specific context.

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Thank you!