What Does It Mean to Read Like a Writer?
(Excerpts
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[In a writing class, you are reading to learn about writing.] When you Read
Like a Writer you work to identify some of the choices the author made so
that you can better understand how such choices might arise in your own
writing. The idea is to carefully examine the things you read, looking at the
writerly techniques in the text in order to decide if you might want to
adopt similar (or the same) techniques in your writing.
…To better understand the ideas in the writing (which you will
automatically do to some degree anyway), you are trying to understand
how the piece of writing was put together by the author and what you can
learn about writing by reading a particular text.
As you read in this way, you think about how the choices the author made
and the techniques that they used are in
fluencing your own responses as a
reader. What is it about the way this text is written that makes you feel and
respond the way you do?
The goal as you read like a writer is to locate what you believe are the most
have on readers.
Why Learn to Read Like a Writer?
Reading Like a Writer can help you understand how the process of
writing is a series of making choices, and in doing so, can help you
recognize important decisions you might face and techniques you might
want to use when working on your own writing. Reading this way
becomes an opportunity to think and learn about writing.

WHAT ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU

START READING?

• Do you know the author

’s purpose for this piece of writing?

• Do you know who the intended audience is for this piece of writing? • In what genre is this written? • Is this a published or a student-produced piece of writing? • Is this the kind of writing you will be assigned to write yourself?

What Are Questions to Ask As You Are Reading?

• What is the author’s purpose for this piece of writing? • Who is the intended audience? • How effective is the language the author uses? Is it too formal? Too

infor mal? Perfectly appropriate?

• What kinds of evidence does the author use to suppor t his/her claims?

Does he/she use statistics? Quotes from famous people? Personal

anecdotes or personal stories? Does he/she cite book s or ar ticles?

• How appropriate or ef fective is this evidence? Would a dif ferent type of

evidence, or some combination of evidence, be more ef fective?

• Are there places in the writing that you

fi nd confusing? What about the

writing in those places makes it unclear or confusing?

• How does the author move from one idea to another in the writing? Are

the transitions between the ideas effective? How else might he/she

have transitioned between ideas instead?

What Should You Be Writing As You Are Reading?

The most common suggestion made by for mer students—mentioned by ever y sing le one of them— [print the text,] …mark up the text, make comments in the margins, and write yourself notes and summaries both during and af ter reading. Of ten the notes students took while reading became ideas or material for the students to use in

their own papers. It ’s important to read with a pen or highlighter in

your hand so that you can mark—right on the text—all those spots where you identify an interesting choice the author has made or a

writerly technique you might want to use. One thing that I like to do is to highlight and underline the passage in the text itself, and then tr y to answer the following three questions on my notepad:

• What is the technique the author is using here?

• Is this technique effective?

• What would be the advantages and disadvantages if I tried this

same technique in my writing?