

Two Modes of Reading

It is helpful to think of critical reading as involving two modes of reading: reading with the author, or trying to completely understand the author's views, and reading the author critically, or questioning the author's views. The first mode is necessary for the second to be possible. By reading in two modes, you will be able to develop your own ideas and theories-but only after thoroughly understanding the author's arguments.

With the Grain

Reading with the author: understanding the author's perspective

1. Make sure you truly understand the author's views and ideas. Summarizing and paraphrasing his/her argument in your own words may be helpful at this stage.
2. Accept the author's ideas temporarily (even if you disagree). Use the author's ideas as a lens with which to look at your world; extend the author's theories with examples of your own that are in agreement.

The Believing Game

- Don't doubt any assertions
- See other experiences or phenomenon in the light of the assertions
- Enter into the skin of a person with other perceptions
- Remain open; be willing to change your mind (at least during game)
- Find ways to believe by metaphor, analogies, association
- Find reasons that it makes sense to agree with the proposition
- Consider positive implications of proposition
- Imagine a belief system in which the proposition makes sense

Against the Grain

Reading the author critically: engaging the author in a dialogue

1. Looking through your own lens now, question and challenge the author. Some things to look for include: limitations, biases, faulty reasoning, questions left unaddressed, and problems with or alternate interpretations of the author's examples.

¹with thanks to Bartholomae, David, and Anthony Petrosky, eds. Ways of Reading, 8th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2008. 10-12; Dara Regaignon, Pomona College, Wendy Menefee-Libey, Harvey Mudd College, Gizem Karaali, Pomona College

2. Now you can form your own ideas and theories. What parts of the author's ideas do you agree with? What parts would you revise? What is your perspective?

The Doubting Game

- Find internal contradictions, find lapses in logic
- Doubt even reasonable assertions
- Look for imprecision, look for mistakes
- Uncover hidden (and not-so-hidden) assumptions and question them
- Compare with your own experiences/readings/observations to find places of dissonance with proposition
- Consider negative implications of proposition

One Way to Read and Analyze

- Find a word from the essay and look it up in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). Be sure to look at the full entry for each word. How does knowing more about the word affect your understanding of the passage?
- Choose a sentence or two from the essay. How does the grammatical structure or syntax of those examples relate to their content? First think about the way sentences are formed, punctuation is used, paragraphs are put together. Then ask yourself: *how do the writer's choices about language and style aid the argument? What do these choices reveal about the writer's argument?*
- Choose an example or two from the essay. Analyze the text's implied attitude or positioning toward the reader/listener and narrator/speaker. What tone does the speaker adopt and how is that tone created? How does the author establish authority as the writer? How does the text position you as the reader/listener? Which elements in the text construct that positioning? How does the author's treatment of you as a reader affect the way in which you respond to the essay?

Assignment

The assignment has two distinct sections (which do not need to flow into one another as a paper would). Read (and reread again) the Borges essay. Use a pencil to mark any key ideas and supporting examples or evidence.

Part 1

Choose one main idea and find three pieces of evidence (words, sentences, examples) from the story to support the main idea. The main idea you are supporting should be *written in italics*, and the three supporting pieces of evidence should be clear to your reader.

Part 2

Choose an idea from the story that goes against the grain of the words on the page. Use the doubting strategy and at least three supporting pieces of evidence to engage the author in a dialogue. You should say something that someone might disagree with (that idea should be *written in italics*).