Managing Graduate Research & Readings

Presented by: Tomás Rivera Center
Graduate Student Learning Assistance

• Academic coaching
• Workshop Series
  • Tools for success, including library research skills, comps/quals prep, APA & Chicago citation styles, framing research question, synthesizing research, and presentation skills
• Academic English Skills Seminar (Sept. 25th)
  • For International and ESL graduate students
• Thesis/Dissertation Group
• Spring Writing Institutes
  • For those working on large writing projects such as thesis, dissertation, seminar or exit paper
Today’s Agenda

- Blueprinting
- Manage reading loads
- Two approaches to thinking
- Reading strategies
  - SRRE reading process
  - Reading research articles
- Note taking
Manage Your Coursework

- Managing your coursework, readings, and research requires *good time management skills* and an understanding of the expectations of the course.
- Each course is different and *requires different study techniques* or skills.
Blueprinting Basics

- Write a short summary of the course in your own words, focusing on topics, themes, and relationships among them.
- Create a visual diagram that captures the organizational structure of these themes and topics.
- Then try to map the texts on to this diagram, which texts address which topics/themes/purposes of the course.
Why Blueprint?

- Prioritize course information
- Set clear purposes for reading specific texts
- Organize and make connections between seemingly isolated facts or concepts
- Remember and recall course content more efficiently
- Understand the function of lectures and texts in the course as a whole
- Anticipate exam topics and questions
Tools to Blueprint

- **Course syllabus**
  - Key word signals such as *theme, aspect, cornerstone, fundamental, perspective, emphasis, focus*, etc.
  - Graphical signals, such as bold face type, underlining, indentation, or boxing
  - Repetitive language—these are likely to be organizing themes

- **Textbook**
  - Table of contents outline format can show you the hierarchy of topics
  - Same other hints as syllabi—repetition, graphic signals, and key words

- **Lecture notes**
  - Introductory lectures expand on the courses objectives, themes, and theoretical approach
Grad level courses don’t use typical textbooks

- Therefore reading demands are embedded in a different kind of course design than is typical with a textbook-centered course.
- The types of texts use aren’t designed to be used as teaching tools.
  - Scholarly or expert texts pose new challenges for a variety of reasons stemming from audience, purpose, genre conventions, and the knowledge authors assume of their “intended” reader.
Your task as a student

- **Build cohesion** among the texts.
- **Adjust your ways of reading** to the variety of genres assigned.
- **Read basic level documents** to augment your knowledge.
- **Read critically** since you will have to evaluate among competing claims.
- **Read selectively** since these genres of text are more repetitive or might contain irrelevant information to your course theme.
You can vary your reading speed depending on your purpose:

- Basic understanding of area
- Class discussion
- Annotated bibliography
- Literature review
- Reading for theory course
- Reading for methodology course
2 Approaches for Thinking

- **Sponge**
  - **Advantages**
    - provides good foundation & base level knowledge
    - is mentally easy
  - **Disadvantages**
    - You can become a mental puppet.
    - You can spend too much time soaking in non-essential information.
Other Approach to Thinking

- Panning for gold
  - Active interaction with knowledge as you acquire it.
- They work together—the sponge is foundational knowledge—a knowledge required for panning/evaluating.
Example: Reading material

- **Sponge**
  - Read carefully
  - Remember as much as possible
  - Underline/highlight
  - Take notes summarizing main points/topics
  - Mission is to find and understand what author says
  - Memorizes reasoning
  - Doesn’t evaluate

- **Panning for gold**
  - Reader asks self a number of questions designed to uncover the best available decisions/beliefs
  - Questions author’s claims
  - Makes notes to self in margins indicating problems with reasoning
  - Forms own conclusion
Four step reading process

1) Skim
2) Reflect
3) Read
4) Evaluate

1) Skim

- The title, headings, and subheadings
- Images and their captions
- Introduction and conclusion
- Abstract or summary
- Visualize (or create) an outline or overview
2) Reflect

- What do you know about this subject or topic?
  - Draw on the knowledge you already have

- What do you think you might know?
  - Are there ideas that seem familiar but need clarification?

- What do you want to know?
  - Set goals

- What’s the main idea or purpose of this text?
3) Read

- Look for answers to your questions
- Look for the essentials
  - According to the article
  - According to your class
  - According to your research
- Vary your reading speed
- Annotate in the margins
  - Ask questions
  - Define key terms
  - Summarize
- After finishing, *briefly* summarize the text
  - What’s the argument?
  - What evidence does the author use to support that argument?
4) Evaluate

- **Ask questions**
  - How would you answer them?
- **Form counter arguments**
  - Do this even if you agree with the text.
- **Think of larger contexts**
  - How does this fit with or depart from other texts?
Reading tips

- Pay attention to repeated words
- Reference images and their captions for clarification
- Limit how many words you look up in the dictionary
- You can reread sections that are unclear; however, remember that understanding every part of every paragraph is not essential to your overall understanding.
Understanding Primary Research Articles

- **Title**
  - Focus of the study, hypothesis, or research question
  - Type of article (primary study, position paper, or literature review)

- **Author & Institution**
  - Seminal author?

- **Abstract**
  - Purpose of the study
  - Source from which data is drawn
  - Method used for collecting data
  - General results
  - General interpretations of the results
The Meat of a Research Article...

- Introduction
  - Argument crafted from literature review
  - Research question
  - Hypothesis

- Methodology
  - Sample
  - Research design
  - Data-collection procedures

- Results
  - Findings, support or non-support of hypothesis

- Discussion/Conclusion
  - Implications and importance of findings. Further research needed?

- Limitations: Is this generalizable?

- References
Note taking

- **Structure**
  - Linear notes
  - Cornell
  - Note cards
  - Mindmapping

- **Focus**

(Mooney & Cole, 2000)
Turns your notes into a study guide.

- The left column is for convenient studying, so write down words that will trigger your memory for what is in the right column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recall Column</th>
<th>Notes Column</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write within 24 hrs of class:</td>
<td>During class:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Key terms</td>
<td>• Take notes here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Names</td>
<td>• This method combines the linear system with the two-column.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dates</td>
<td>Tip: Write in words you understand, not necessarily your professor's.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Concepts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of notes:**
Write within 24 hours of class.
A catch all organizational structure very similar to a list. Elements are related to a central point in a variety of ways that are not systematized.
Let your focus play to your strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Based on...</th>
<th>For those who</th>
<th>Tips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>ask “why?”</td>
<td>Format notes by question. Try to answer the questions later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>are associative thinkers.</td>
<td>Use mindmaps. Plot and label the connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>love the big ideas.</td>
<td>Supplement details later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Details</td>
<td>love the minute.</td>
<td>Supplement broader concepts later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications</td>
<td>learn through experience.</td>
<td>Ask, “how does this work?” or “Where have I seen this in action?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>are “passionate” learners.</td>
<td>Allow yourself to react emotionally. See where it takes you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anecdotes</td>
<td>learn through stories and relationships.</td>
<td>Record other apparently unrelated details...clothing or weather, for example.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thanks!

Any questions?