



## Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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### Guidelines for Reading Essays

Reading an essay can be a difficult task. Having a plan of attack can help to resolve some of the problems before they become overwhelming. Here is a suggested list of steps that you might take in order to help you get the most out of your reading.

1. Read through entire essay.
2. Try to write out the main point you think the author was trying to make in your own words.
3. Look at the beginning of the essay to see if you can find a thesis statement. (Remember they are sometimes implied, not stated directly, and refer to #2.)
4. Re-read the essay and underline or write out the main points that support the thesis.
5. Look up any words you do not know. Make sure the definition fits the context of the sentence.
6. Look at the different ways the author uses to make his/her points. e.g., anecdotes, examples, statistics. In what way do they support the meaning of the essay?
7. Write a one-paragraph summary of the essay.
8. Read the essay aloud with a classmate and discuss each paragraph and finally the entire essay.
9. Focus on what seems to be getting in the way of your understanding of the essay.
10. Discuss or write out the possible prompts or test questions that might be used for this essay and think about how you would respond.

### Rhetorical Devices

In order to make their writing more effective, writers of essays often use a variety of devices. Being able to identify them and to understand their purpose can help you to grasp the point that the author is trying to make. Below, are some of the common tricks that authors use to engage their readers.

#### Rhetorical Question: a question without a direct answer

The author / speaker raises a question, but doesn't answer it directly as he/she sees the answer (usually Yes or No) as obvious.

Rhetorical questions are used to provoke, emphasize or argue.

- When public money brings windfalls to a few, why should the state not take a share?
- But was the best way to win them over to threaten to ignore them altogether? Like so many things this week, the administration's diplomacy needs a smoother touch. (Note that the sentence following the question is not an answer to it.)

#### Repetition: repeating words or phrases

Words or phrases are repeated throughout the text to emphasize certain facts or ideas.

- Down, down, down. Would the fall never come to an end! »I wonder how many miles I've fallen by this time?« she said aloud. [...]  
Down, down, down. There was nothing else to do, so Alice soon began talking again. [...]
- America, at its best, matches a commitment to principle with a concern for civility. A civil society demands from each of us good will and respect, fair dealing and forgiveness. [...]  
America, at its best, is also courageous. Our national courage [...] America, at its best, is compassionate. In the quiet of American conscience, we know that deep, persistent poverty is unworthy of our nation's promise. [...]

#### Parallelism: parallel sentence structure

Successive clauses or sentences are similarly structured. This similarity makes it easier for the reader / listener to concentrate on the message.

- We are bound by ideals that move us beyond our backgrounds, lift us above our interest, and teach us what it means to be citizens. <sup>(2)</sup>
- The mediocre teacher tells, The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires. (William A. Ward)
- The mistakes of the fool are known to the world, but not to himself. The mistakes of the wise man are known to himself, but not to the world. (Charles Caleb Colton)
- Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I will learn. (Benjamin Franklin)

#### Alliteration: repetition of initial consonant sound

The initial consonant sound is usually repeated in two neighboring words (sometimes also in words that are not next to each other). Alliteration draws attention to the phrase and is often used for emphasis.

Examples:

- for the greater good of ...
  - safety and security
  - share a continent but not a country
- Repetition of initial consonant sounds means that only the sound must be the same, not the consonants themselves.
- Examples:
- killer command
  - fantastic philosophy
  - A neat knot need not be re-knotted.