MAPPING TEXTS: THE READING/WRITING CONNECTION

(adapted from Irene L. Clark. *Writing the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: Entering the Conversation*. Prentice Hall, 2007)

The strategies students observe in reading can become part of their own repertoire for writing.

Stuart Greene. "Exploring the Relationship Between Authorship and Reading"

Being able to read effectively and efficiently is necessary for any kind of scholarship. However, when students read scholarly texts for a class or a research project, they sometimes feel as if they are entering a strange country, a foreign landscape, with unmarked paths and roads that are bewilderingly difficult to navigate. As they struggle to find their way, they may wish for a set of directions or a "map" of the terrain that will enable them to traverse its roads more effectively.

This chapter discusses strategies for "mapping" the texts you will need for writing your thesis or dissertation, based on insights derived from reading theory. You will note that it uses metaphors associated with travel—words such as "navigation," "direction," "terrain," "signposts," and "maps." Viewing reading in terms of travel can yield mapping strategies that can help you derive more from your reading and adapt strategies you perceive in published works to your own writing—that is, you will learn to "*read*" like a writer.

THE CHALLENGE OF "NAVIGATING" UNFAMILIAR AND DENSELY POPULATED TEXTS

Most college students have had successful experiences in school and expect that they will be able to complete assigned reading without too much difficulty. However, in some classes, the reading expectations may be quite challenging, and some of it may presume a background that you do not have yet. You may find a lot of it quite difficult to understand--and there is so much of it! How can you manage to read effectively and efficiently when you are trying to complete reading assignments for a college class?

Effective Reading is Not Necessarily Quick Reading

Ours is a culture that values efficiency, and in the context of graduate school, the implication is that "good" readers are "fast" readers. Advertisements for speed-reading classes abound, and you may feel frustrated if you don't understand an academic article or book right away. Pressured for time, you may attempt to "skim" material needed for a class or for a research project. But when you finish "reading," you may discover that you didn't understand it very well—possibly you didn't understand it at all.

An important idea to keep in mind is that some reading is going to take a great deal of time and that you may have to read some texts more than once in order to engage with them and incorporate them into your own writing. Some material, of course, you will want to skim, in order to get a quick overview of its potential usefulness. But some of it, you will have to read slowly, struggling with ideas and leaving some to be understood later. Here, then, is an important concept to remember when you read a scholarly text:

You don't have to understand every single idea in a text the first time you read it.

Many articles and books presume a familiarity with concepts which, for you, may be completely unfamiliar. Casual references may be made to studies, theories, or issues that you have not yet encountered. Moreover, many scholarly texts are not written for easy comprehension. Although it would be desirable if scholars wrote articles and books with the goal of making their ideas clearly understood, many do not, and you may have to slog through dense jungles of text, leaving some of it unexplored, or only partially cleared. Sometimes, later sections will clarify early confusions in the same text. But you may have to re-navigate a text—that is, read it several times in order to understand it fully.

Constructing a Map of a Text

Inexperienced readers often begin the process of academic reading as follows: they glance at the title of a text or ignore it altogether. Then they simply begin reading from the beginning, proceeding step by step, hacking their way through each word and sentence, attempting to understand each idea as it is presented to them on the page.

In contrast, experienced readers attempt to obtain significant information about a text *before* they begin to read—in essence, to construct a map of the text that will enable them to navigate it more effectively. Here are ten strategies for constructing such a map:

1. Get an overview of its topography.

Before you begin reading carefully with the goal of comprehending the ideas in a text, consider whether or not it is worth exploring. Examine the title, head notes, introductory material, table of contents, and organizational structure. Do these features enable you to view the text in terms of structure and main ideas? Can you perceive its peaks and valleys, or the roads that will enable you to navigate? Are there digressions that lead away from the central direction?

2. Examine the text for its central "moves."

In his book *Genre Analysis*, John Swales, discusses the importance of "moves" in academic texts as a way of understanding how a text achieves its rhetorical goal of impacting an intended audience. A "move," in Swales's system, can be understood as a "direction" in which the text proceeds to make its point, and when you look at the moves in the texts you read, you will be able construct a map that will help you navigate. The process of tracing the moves or thought patterns in a text can enable you to understand that text more clearly. Also, when you focus on how that text works to develop its ideas—to read *rhetorically*-- you will gain familiarity with typical text patterns that you can adapt for your own purposes. Reading rhetorically means that you read a text not only to understand what it *says*, but also to discern how it *works*-- that is, how the writer structures the text and uses language to communicate ideas and influence readers.

Some of Swales's research focused on moves characteristic of introductions in a research article, and after he studied many such introductions, he constructed a three move scheme that he designated the Create a Research Space (CARS) model. Below is a diagram of that model:

Move 1   Establishing a territory

Move 2   Establishing a niche

Move 3   Occupying the niche

Examining the moves in a text will help you understand how the text functions and enhance your grasp of its content. You can then approach reading with a dual focus—to understand *what a text is saying* and to analyze *how it says it*. This dual focus is crucial for working with complex texts, both as a reader and a writer.

3. Consider the text in a rhetorical context.

The concept of "moves" is based on the idea that nearly all texts have a rhetorical goal—that is, they are written by *someone* (the writer or author) in order to have an impact on an intended audience. Try to determine, then, who that "someone" might be. What sort of persona is communicated in the text? Does this person seem trustworthy? What might be the author's motive for writing this particular text? What central arguments are made? Can you see where the author is "going" as he or she proceeds along the paths of the text?

Because authors write articles and books in order to join a scholarly conversation, consider the nature of that conversation. Does the title give a clue as to the author's purpose? Does the author wish to change readers' view about an idea or belief? Does the author wish to clarify an uncertainty or problematize what is usually regarded as a certainty?

4. Situate the text within your discipline.

Disciplines are filled with disagreements, controversies, and uncertainties, and a text often provides the site for an ongoing debate. Can you determine the controversy (or conversation) that a particular text is addressing? In the context of the "mapping" metaphor, can you characterize the "site" of this text in reference to other texts that address a similar topic? Is it left, right, or center? How do you know?

5. Locate the "sea of former texts"—Areas of 'intertextuality"

Charles Bazerman, in "Intertextuality: How Texts Rely on Other Texts," observes that "we create our texts out of the sea of former texts that surround us, the sea of language we live in. And we understand the texts of others within that same sea" (83). Scholarly texts are thus characterized by "intertextuality," which can be defined as the "explicit and implicit relations that a text has to prior, contemporary or future texts" (Bazerman 84); i.e., texts that reference other texts. To a point, intertextuality relies on the reader being familiar with the previous texts

the author is referencing. For example, "The Comfort Zone: Growing Up with Charlie Brown," by Jonathan Franzen, references the *Peanuts* comics in several places. Sometimes the reference is implied—e.g., an image, symbolism, or a metaphor—at other times, the reference is obvious. Either way, this is intertextuality.

As you navigate your articles and books, note the location of this "sea" of intertextuality. What sources does the text build upon? Which ones does it oppose? What insights into the terrain of the text can you gain by noting the works it incorporates? Note instances of direct or indirect quotation and the use of particular phrases or terms.

6. Compare this text to other texts you have read.

As you read, consider whether this text resembles other texts you have previously "visited." Is it structured similarly or does it adhere to patterns associated with a particular genre? Or does it flaunt your expectations? As you traverse its roads, does it seem familiar, or are there unexpected bumps along the road, places that require you to leap across a chasm? Comparing a text to other texts in your discipline, and, in particular, to those that pertain to your topic, can aid your reading comprehension and is also essential to writing the literature review.

7. Consider WHY you are reading this text.

As you navigate the text, ask yourself the following questions associated explorers probably ask themselves:

What am I doing here?
Why should I continue on this journey?
What do I expect to learn from this text?
How can I use this text in my research?

8. Create signposts that will enable you to see the path more clearly

If it is possible, mark the text as you proceed. Highlight important sections or interact with the text with comments in the margin. Take notes that summarize important ideas. Signposts can be a helpful guide if you decide to incorporate this particular text into your own writing.

9. Keep track of your own location as you proceed.

As you move through the text, pause periodically to ask yourself, "Am I learning anything from this text? Has it altered my perspective in some way about my topic?" Pause from time to time to consider the impact of this text on you as a student engaged in writing a thesis or dissertation.

10. Evaluate your presence within this text.

As you read, consider the value of the text you are navigating. Is this a text that you will want to revisit? Does it warrant additional attention? Do you think another trip would be worthwhile?

Reviewing the process of mapping a text:

The strategies for navigating or "mapping" a text may be summarized as follows:

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1. Get an overview of its topography.

2. Examine the text for its central "moves."

3. Consider the text in a rhetorical context.

4. Situate the text within your discipline.

5. Keep track of your own location as you proceed.

6. Evaluate your presence within this text,

7. Locate the "sea of former texts"—Areas of 'intertextuality."

8. Consider WHY you are reading this text.

9. Compare this text to other texts you have read.

10. Evaluate your presence within this text.

Applying Strategies for Mapping a Text:

1. Apply as many of the strategies discussed above. Can you situate that article in terms of the writer's goal or motive? Does he or she address a controversy or problem? Is there a

conversation that he or she is joining? Can you point to a statement in that text that enables the author to enter the scholarly conversation? Not all these questions are applicable in the texts you have read, but consider the ones that do apply.

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