

**WHAT IT DOES NOT DO**

- Voice reactions and criticisms
- Free-associate with other subjects

We cannot overstate how important we think it is to do this activity frequently. practice will enhance your fluency and help you to trust writing as a tool of thought. It is the best place to practice the heuristics in this book. (Also see the short *Freewriting: How and Why to Do It*, in Chapter 1.)

**phrasing**

phrasing is an essential skill in reading closely. It is discussed at length in Chapter 2. Here is a quick reprise of the procedure.

**PARAPHRASE FOR IMPLICATION**

- Locate a short key passage
- Assume you **don't** understand it completely
- Substitute other concrete language for **all** of the key words
- Repeat the paraphrasing several times
- Ponder the differences in implication among the versions
- Return to the original passage and interpret its meanings

Essive restatement allows you to arrive at your own sense of the significance of the sentence. An essential last step in paraphrasing is to return to the original statement and take stock: "This is what I now understand the passage to mean, having done the phrasing."

**the Commonplace Book**

Professional writers have long kept commonplace books—essentially, records of their reading. Most such books consist primarily of quotations the writers have found striking and memorable. The goal of keeping a commonplace book in a notebook is to bring you closer to the language you find most interesting, which you will store in your memory as you copy it onto the page. It's remarkable what you will notice about a sentence (and the ideas in it) if you copy it out rather than just underline or highlight it. Moreover, you will find yourself remembering *the original language* that has struck you most forcefully in the reading. That way you can continue to ponder key words and phrases and to stay engaged, almost physically, with what the writers have said.

When we assign commonplace books in our courses, we stipulate that everyone collect at least two quotations (with citation) from each reading. (These often anchor the reading and passage-based focused freewriting—see the Try This on the next page.) At the end of the semester, every student will have produced a compressed history of

his or her reading to supplement class notes and others' commentaries. Note: segregate your commonplace book, whether on paper or online, into a separate notebook or file. This makes the book sequential and browseable.

**Try This 5.1: Writing & Reading with Others: A Sequence of Activities**

We use this sequence of writing-about-reading activities regularly in our classes. It also works in small, self-directed groups, both in and outside the classroom.

1. Spend 5–10 minutes pointing on some piece of reading. Remember: no one should comment on his or her choice of sentences during the pointing exercise.
2. Without pausing for discussion, spend 10 minutes doing a passage-based focused freewrite on a sentence or several similar sentences from the reading. It is important to write nonstop and to keep writing throughout the appointed time.
3. Volunteers take turns reading all or part of their freewrites aloud to the group without comment. It is essential that people read rather than describe or summarize what they wrote. As each person reads, listeners should jot down words and phrases that catch their attention.
4. Listeners call out what they heard in the freewrite by responding to the question, "What did you hear?"

**SITUATE THE READING RHETORICALLY: FIND THE PITCH, THE COMPLAINT, AND THE MOMENT**

There is no such thing as "just information." Virtually all readings possess what speech-act theorists call "illocutionary force"—the goal of an utterance. Everything you read, to varying degrees, is aware of you, the audience, and is dealing with you in some way.

One of the most productive ways of analyzing a reading is to consider the frame within which a piece is presented: who its intended audience is, what it seeks to persuade that audience about, and how the writer presents himself or herself to appeal to that audience. Readings virtually never treat these questions explicitly, and thus, it is a valuable analytical move to infer a reading's assumptions about audience (see the short *take, Rhetoric: What It Is and Why You Need It*, in Chapter 1).

An element of situating a reading rhetorically is to locate what it seeks to accomplish and what it is set against at a given moment in time. We address these concerns as a quest to find what we call the pitch, the complaint, and the moment:

- the **pitch**, what the piece wishes you to believe;
- the **complaint**, what the piece is reacting to or worried about; and
- the **moment**, the historical and cultural context within which the piece is operating.

Here's a bit more on each.

*The pitch:* A reading is an argument, a presentation of information that makes a case of some sort, even if the argument is not explicitly stated. Look for language that reveals the position or positions the piece seems interested in having you adopt.

*The complaint:* A reading is a reaction to some situation, some set of circumstances, that the piece has set out to address, even though the writer may not say so openly. An indispensable means of understanding someone else's writing is to figure out what seems to have caused the person to write the piece in the first place. Writers write, presumably, because they think *something* needs to be addressed. What is that something? Look for language in the piece that reveals the writer's starting point. If you can find the position or situation he or she is worried about and possibly trying to correct, you will more easily locate the pitch, the position the piece asks you to accept.

*The moment:* A reading is a response to the world conditioned by the writer's particular moment in time. In your attempt to figure out not only what a piece says but where it is coming from (the causes of its having been written in the first place and the positions it works to establish), history is significant. When was the piece written? Where? What else was going on at the time that might have shaped the writer's ideas and attitudes?

### The Pitch, the Complaint, and the Moment: Two Brief Examples

Here are two examples of student writing in response to the request that they locate the pitch, the complaint, and the moment for a famous essay in the field of Composition and Rhetoric, "Inventing the University" by David Bartholomae.

Bartholomae's complaint seems to center around the idea that writing is typically taught at a grammatical, not intellectual level. 'Basic' writers are identified by their sentence level compositional errors, not by the content of their ideas or ability to present a complex argument. Bartholomae argues that students must be drawn into the language and mindset of academia before they have the authority to confidently expand upon more complicated ideas. Students are expected to fluently participate in academic discourse long before they have the authority to pull it off with ease. Therefore, students should be familiarized with the world of academia and led through the preliminary steps towards becoming proficient in its language. This is the only way to make them more authoritative writers.

And here is another example that treats the moment in particular:

The moment, or the specific time in which the essay was written, offers some valuable insight into what might have shaped Bartholomae's perspective. First, it is important to note the other writers and thinkers Bartholomae cites throughout the essay. Take the author's frequent mention of writer Pat Bizzell whom Bartholomae deems "one of the most important scholars now writing on 'basic writers'" and whom he recognizes as "owing a

great debt to." He credits Bizzell with seeing how difficult it is for young writers to learn the complex vocabularies and conventions of academic discourse.

There are most likely other, more broadly cultural influences at work as well, such as the American political scene in 1985. In 1984 Ronald Reagan was re-elected president. His presidency and the conservative climate it fostered sparked change in Americans' attitude toward education. Reagan's policies mandated spending cuts and, it can reasonably be assumed, invited certain anti-academic and more pre-professional attitudes. In this moment, then, Bartholomae's concerns about higher education and the need for students to gain access into the privileged world of the educated begins to make more sense.

### Audience Analysis: A Brief Example

Consider the following paragraph of student writing on the same essay, this time focused on how the essay's author establishes his relationship with his target audience. Here is the assignment the writer was responding to: Write a brief analysis of the essay's rhetoric—the various methods it employs to gain acceptance with its target audience. (a) Who is the target audience? How can you tell? Cite and analyze evidence. (b) What decisions has the author made on how best to "sell" his argument to this audience? How do you know?

Bartholomae often uses the inclusive "us" to describe academia, putting the reader (presumably, academics) above the level of those being discussed. Students must be taught "to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (3). He effectively builds up the reader, perhaps making him or her more open to absorbing the argument that follows. He refrains from criticizing, including his audience in his idea and putting them on the same level as he is. He refers to the students as 'our students' and writes almost as though the reader is separate from any flaws in the current system. He writes to colleagues, with the tone of one sharing something new and interesting.

### Try This 5.2: Locating the Pitch and the Complaint

Go to [aldaily.com](http://aldaily.com) (Arts & Letters Daily, the website sponsored by the Chronicle of Higher Education). Locate an article on a topic you find interesting. It should be a substantive piece of thinking, as opposed to an editorial or a piece of popular commentary.