

OWLS Writing Guides: Reading Strategically



Before you Read

1. Determine **why** you are reading. What is your purpose for reading? What you will be expected to do with what you read? Will you be expected to

- demonstrate your understanding of the ideas and how they are organized? (summary)
- defend your position in relation to those ideas? (argument)
- relate the reading to your own experiences? (reflection)
- assess the effectiveness of the text? (analysis/evaluation)
- use the reading as a source in your own research? (summary, analysis, argument)

2. Determine **what** you are reading. Note the type of writing you are working with—personal essay, scholarly journal article, newspaper article, textbook, website, blog post, and so on. Different genres have different conventions, purposes, and intended audiences. It is also useful to note the facts of publication: Where was this reading first published? When? Who is the author? Who is the audience? Knowing these facts can help you determine the currency of the information, the credibility of the author, and the profile of the intended audience—all elements you should know to read a text critically.

3. Preview the text. Skim to get a general overview of the main point, purpose, structure, and complexity. Look at the introduction, the first line of each body paragraph, and the conclusion. Look at any other features that give you a clue about the work's key points, such as subheadings, visuals (charts, graphs, pictures), and bulleted lists, as well as any pre- or post-reading questions given with the reading. These will give you specific questions seek answers to as you read.

4. Determine the best strategy for **how** to read the text. Know the kind of text you are working with and why you are reading it will help you choose the **reading strategies** most useful to your purpose.

Reading to Understand Ideas

Highlighting

To highlight a text means to mark the text with underlining and symbols as you read. Use highlighting to call attention to the most important information in the text.

- underline (or mark with a highlighter) the key ideas, such as thesis statement and topic sentences of each paragraph in the body of the reading
- place a ✓ or ☆ next to key ideas
- draw arrows to connect related ideas
- box or circle important words and phrases
- place a ? next to a word you need to look up or any concept you need to clarify later

Tip: Don't over-do it. Be selective and highlight only key points. Reading a paragraph or passage all the way through before highlighting will help you see what the key points are.

Annotating

To annotate a text means to write notes on the text as you read. Use annotation to record the most important information in the text.

- write brief summary notes in the margins to record main points and key examples
- write the definition of any word you need to look up
- number or label the key points or major sections to highlight the organization of the text

Mapping

These strategies lead you to create a graphic summary of the ideas and their connections. These strategies record the key points while helping you **visualize** hierarchical relationships among the ideas in a text (general ideas and specific supporting details).

Traditional Outline: As you read, list the key points and supporting details in simple outline form, in the order in which the ideas appear in the text. Start by writing the main idea of the reading. You don't need to construct a formal outline, but do use indentation to distinguish main points from more specific supporting information.

Main idea of the reading

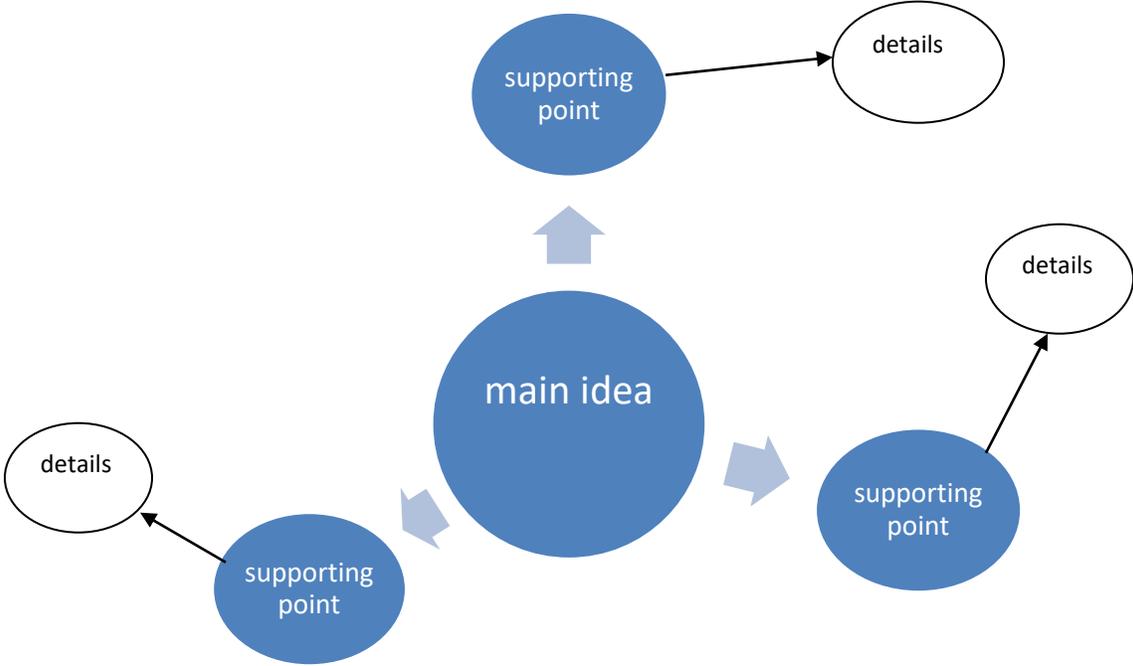
- 1st supporting point
 - Specific details/evidence
- 2nd supporting point
 - Specific details/evidence
- 3rd supporting point
 - Specific details/evidence
- Concluding idea

After you've finished, look over your outline as you review the text to see if you've left out any important information.

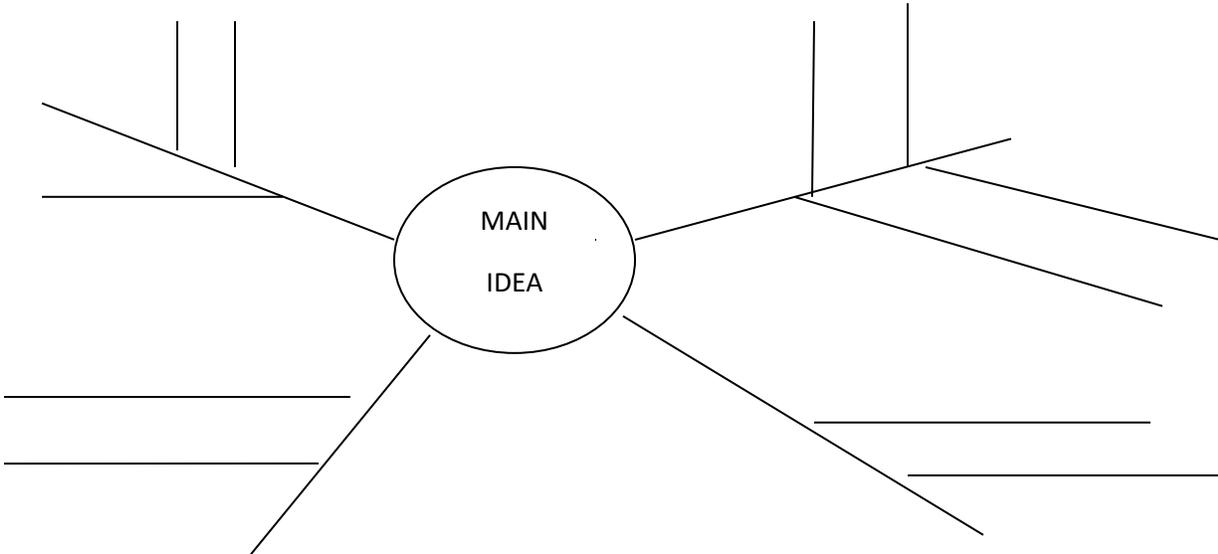
Graphic Organizer: Similar to an outline, but includes all key parts of the reading.

Title		
Introduction	Background information, context	
	Thesis/main idea	
Body paragraphs and/or sections	Point 1	
	key details	
	Point 2	
	key details	
	Point 3	
	key details	
	Point 4	
	key details	
Conclusion	Closing idea	

Radial map: Main idea is written in the central circle, and supporting ideas radiate out from the central point in a way that shows connections between those ideas and the central point.

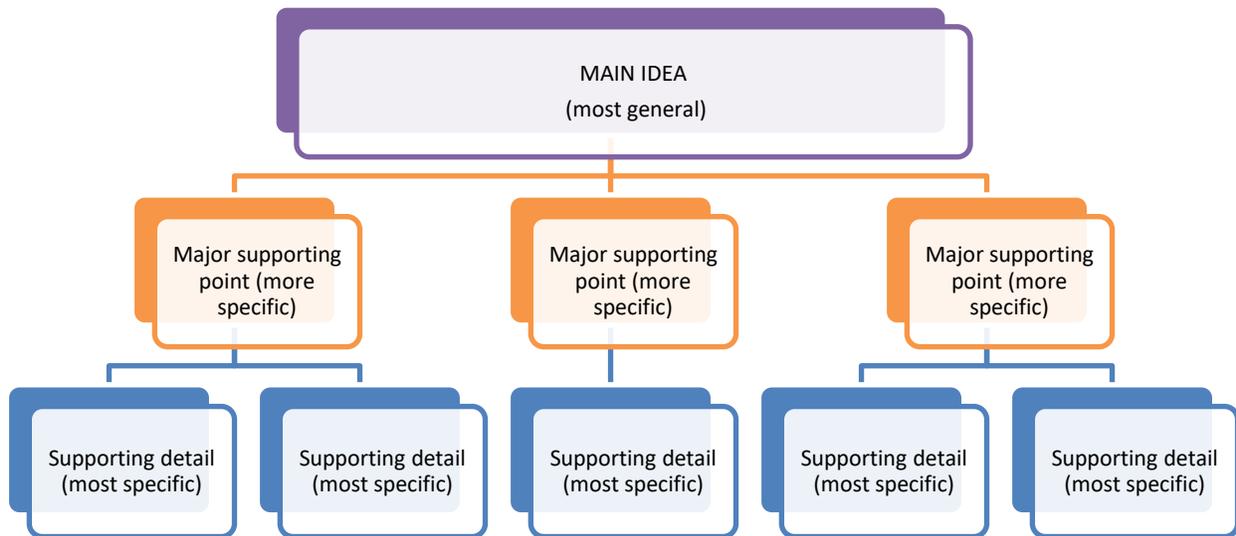


Wheel Map: Main idea is the hub of the wheel, secondary supports form the spokes of the wheel, and specific details branch from each spoke.



Branching Map:

Arrange ideas in hierarchical order, going from the general point of the reading (thesis, main idea) to specific information that supports and develops that point (supporting ideas, reasons, facts, examples, and other details). This method helps you to visualize and understand how main and supporting points relate to one another.



Reading to Respond Critically

Annotating

In addition to highlighting the text to understand its ideas and organization, make annotations that record your reactions to and interactions with the text. These annotations should lead you to a deeper understanding of the text that goes further than simple comprehension of information.

Typical annotations include the following:

- Thoughts, questions, and other reactions to writer's ideas and claims
- Points of agreement or disagreement with the writer
- Connections to your own experiences
- Challenges to the writer's ideas
- Comments on the writer's rhetoric (writing techniques, evidence, appeals, other strategies)
- Points or passages you find difficult to understand (try to determine why)

Says/Does Annotation

Says/Does annotation records both what the text *says* (the content) and what the writer *does* to convey content. Use Says/Does annotation when you need to examine not only meaning, but the ways through which the writer communicates meaning using particular strategies and techniques. To do this, write *says* annotations in one margin and *does* annotations in the other:

- In the left margin, next to each paragraph or section, write a brief note summarizing what the text *says*. This will help you understand and follow the writer’s ideas and line of development, step by step.
- In the right margin, again next to each paragraph or section, write a brief note identifying and describing what the writer *does* to convey meaning (such as using an example, citing an authority, explaining a process, conceding a point, making a comparison, and so on). Your purpose for reading should guide your annotations.

Reading as a Believer/Doubter

This reading strategy will help you to explore the text from different perspectives in order to understand how different audiences might respond to the same text, to arrive at a credible and balanced evaluation of a text, or to determine your own stance on the issue presented in a text.

Reading as a Believer

When you read as a believer, you take on the role of the accepting reader open to the writer’s claims and willing to understanding the subject from the writer’s point-of-view. Your annotations will note various reasons why a reader might accept the writer’s points:

- What are the strong points in the text? Why are they strong?
- What supporting evidence helps to make these points strong?
- How does the writer try to connect with readers?
- How do my own experiences and ideas confirm the writer’s view and help me to understand and accept the writer’s thesis?
- What other strengths do I see in the text?

Reading as a Doubter

When you read as a doubter, you take on the role of the skeptical reader seeking to question, challenge, and find flaws with the text. Your annotations will note the flaws, as well as questions, doubts, and challenges you pose to the writer’s points:

- What are the weak points of the text?
- What evidence does not work well as support? Why?
- Where would the writer need to supply more or better supporting evidence?
- Where could the writer have tried to connect better with readers?
- How do my own experiences and ideas challenge or make me question the writer’s points?
- What other flaws do I see in the text?

References:

Carillo, Ellen C. *A Writer’s Guide to Mindful Reading*. The WAC Clearinghouse, 2017.
 Taylor, Tim, and Linda Copeland. *Ideas and Aims for College Writing*. Pearson, 2016.
 Gardner, John N., and Betsy O. Barefoot. *Step by Step to College and Career Success*. 6th ed., Bedford/St
 Martins, 2015.