

On Learning and Writing; or, suggestions on using your class time to maximize your learning—and improve your grade! by Paul J. Croce, American Studies, Stetson University
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Reading, especially non-fiction: (in a way that will help you cope with information glut)

1. get an overview of the reading by carefully examining introduction and layout; this can give you a good sense of the overall purpose of the writing.
2. once you have an overview, read in degrees: read some parts more carefully, some less.
3. look for examples to illustrate the overall theme.

Making best use of class time: the three-legged stool; to stand up, well it needs all three legs!

1. *Before*, read assigned reading: if it is difficult to understand, at least read for familiarity.
2. *During*, listen in class for guides to understanding the reading: background information, key points in the reading that emerge in the exchange of ideas, and different points of view.
3. *After*, review material: bring together what you had read before class and what you learned in class—often brief, but usually with a big payoff!

Things to learn from class: (much like steps in writing, and good way to get ready for it)

1. *subject matter*: what is being talked about?—important for factual *information*.
2. *meanings*: how, why, what are the implications?—important for interpretive *organization*.
3. *themes*: what are the points of view and how are they built up?—important for *judgments*.
4. *vocabulary*: along the way, what are some *special terms*?

Short writing: (bridges from personal learning to class, from class to extended writing)

1. When taking notes on a reading, event, or experience, try to capture what is going on and then reflect on its meaning.
2. Two goals for assigned essays: *Report* what you learned (this involves understanding the topic's facts and point of view), and *Reflect* on what you have learned (this involves your own point of view).
3. With short writing as a "teleprompter," you are better prepared to talk about your ideas.

Stages of writing: (short essays and class time can offer practice for each stage)

1. *Reporting on a topic*: this is in answer to basic "what" questions: what did you read; what was happening in this material; what did you learn? This has to do with observing.
2. *Identifying the point*: this is in answer to questions about the argument being presented: How or why did things happen? How did the presenter arrange the facts to support a point of view? This has to do with interpreting what you have been observing.
3. *Organizing your points*: this is a matter of fleshing out what you have identified about the argument at hand: what are the pieces of the argument; how are those selected facts arranged to guide the reader to a particular point of view? This has to do with understanding what you have been interpreting.
4. *Formulating your argument*: this is a matter of assembling facts and arguments on a topic and presenting your own perspective on them: after weighing different factors, what do you think of this material; what is your judgment? This has to do with responding to what you have understood.

Stages of assignments: (and class time can help at each stage)

1. Your own notes: They foster daily steps in learning, promote your exchange of ideas in class, and let class time serve as a chance to "check under the hood" of your learning.
2. short writing: drawing upon your notes and building up practice for longer writing.
3. longer writing, with research and analysis: lots of paragraphs, like many short papers now integrated around the theme of the longer goal.

Do you want my opinion?

Yes, but back it up. *How?* By creating evaluations based on a blending of your opinion with the facts and reasons that can support the opinion you have of the subject at hand:

your evaluation, at its best, it should combine:

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facts and reasons	opinion
writing based on this alone would be dry	writing based on this alone would be slanted