

NON-FICTION WORKSHEET

This worksheet is designed to offer some strategies through which you can make sense of the non-fiction readings for most courses.

- Argument or thesis – can be stated as question, in the negative, introduced and elaborated on. Ask yourself the following questions: Why does the author write the piece? What does s/he seek to convey?
- Does the essay offer “clues” as to the author’s subject position, i.e. with regard to gender, race, class, intellectual orientation? Does it demonstrate how the author intended the essay be used?
- With regard to author’s subject position, look for identifiable word choices or verb form choices. Also consider what author *does not* say; these “unsaid” can give readers access into the texts they read (though not **unlimited** access because framed by what is said).
- Look for Idea/example pairs, moments when the author introduces an idea and then offers an example that solidifies that idea.
- Look for further support for argument; try to determine if it is good, bad, or ineffective. What examples does the author use to support his/her argument? Are the examples exactly the same throughout the essay? Do they vary? If they vary, what does each kind of example contribute to the argument?
- Note what’s missing and think about the implications of this absence
- Can you mimic the author’s thinking and/or ideas by using examples not offered in their essay (reading with the grain)?
- Can you challenge or critique the author’s ideas by drawing on examples not offered in their essay (reading against the grain)?
- Think about how can these ideas be used to elaborate on, challenge, or complicate the form and/or content of our required, fictional texts.
- After all this, you should be clear on author’s argument, subject position, examples and support; you then will be able to determine whether essay is persuasive: does it support, challenge, unseat what you know about the topic? Does the argument make sense (is it logical)? Who are, and what’s the reputation of, the author’s authorities?