

Deeper Readings

Getting More Information, Insight, & Enjoyment Out of What You Read

Examining the Forms & Functions of What We Read

In his famous essay "On Studies," **Francis Bacon**, an English philosopher and essayist, wrote:

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.

Our varied reading experiences confirm these observations. **We read for many reasons** – insight, entertainment, and more – and **texts exist for different purposes, situations, and audiences**.

Physical and functional differences of texts become very apparent as we compare **ictionaries, encyclopedias, newspapers, essays, poems, and novels**: each of these texts has its own unique design, logic, set of ideas, intentions, uses, and styles of presentation and expression.

The presence or absence of a **table of contents**, a **dedication**, an **introduction** (or **preface**), an **epigraph** (a quotation at the beginning of a book or chapter), **illustrations** or **photographs**, **punctuation marks**, **footnotes**, an **appendix** (or **appendices** – material at the end of a book), and **afterword**, as well as an **index** – any of these can **alter** or **enhance** your reading experience.

Endeavoring to **understand and appreciate how each text is designed and presented** can help you access, understand, and enjoy a text more completely and lastingly. This can be especially true when you read **literary classics** and **poetry**, where **form, rhythms** and **rhymes** (or the free-flowing nature of words) are significant. Even the **shape, spacing**, and **sounds** of a poem's lines can influence a reader's impressions and interpretations.

To delve even **deeper into the forms and functions of texts**, try exploring **library items or websites** on the topic of **writing**, as well as the **structure** and **terminology** specific to certain kinds of writings. Here are some **concepts** (or "**search terms**") you might consider for further research:

- For **general writing**: grammar, syntax, paragraphs, pagination, diction, setting, point of view (narrator or speaker), outline, style manual, interpretation, creative writing, literary criticism
- For **novels / fiction**: plot, narrative, characterization, dialogue, conflict and resolution
- For **poetry**: poetics, prosody, verse forms, meter, rhyme scheme, stanzas (couplet, tercet, quatrain, cinquain, sestet, septet, octave), free verse, speaker of the poem, sonnet, haiku
- For **plays (drama)**: prologue, act, scene, cast (characters, *dramatis personae*), monologue, aside, soliloquy, dramatic irony, *deus ex machina*, stage directions, exposition, denouement, epilogue
- For **essays**: thesis statement, hypothesis, topic sentences, compare and contrast, cause and effect, personal essay, persuasive essay, narrative essay, argument, analysis
- For **magazines/newspapers**: layout, column, byline, headline, side bar, section, edition, insert
- For **websites / blogs**: web pages, site map, index, directory, links (hyperlinks), About page

Learning – even just a *little* – how poets, journalists, dramatists, screenwriters, and other writers structure, develop, and express ideas can help you better *understand, appreciate, and enjoy* texts you encounter in the future. Even your conversations and writing can become "deeper" and more meaningful as you learn new things and feel more confident and creative when expressing ideas.

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Delving Deeper...

There are *many* other things we can do or consider as we attempt to deepen our reading experiences and making them more meaningful and memorable. Here are some suggestions to consider:

- **Eliminate distractions** to help focus your attentions on a text. **Set aside personal time** just for reading.
- **Try reading with a purpose:** **to learn, discover, enjoy, increase your awareness of a topic...**
- **Keep a dictionary nearby** when reading so you can **look up words you do not understand, check how a word is spelled**, or explore alternate usages of a word (or phrase) which could produce other meanings. If you do not own a dictionary, consider purchasing one – or borrow one from your library. You can also look up words online: our **Ready Reference Center** (thrall.org/readyref) has links to **online dictionaries**. To go deeper yet: look up the **etymology** (history) of a word. Not all dictionaries provide etymologies: try a “**college dictionary**,” or, for the ultimate experience, the “**OED**” – the ***Oxford English Dictionary!***
- Thrall and other public libraries offer **very helpful books** on topics such as **reading comprehension, literacy, vocabulary, grammar and syntax, writing style manuals**, and more. Ask a librarian!
- If a text was **translated**, consider looking up the text in its **original language** or check to see if other (or newer) translations exist. You might **consider learning another language** to **expand** your reading abilities!
- **Allusions** – references to **ideas, myths, persons, literary works, historic events**, and more – can exist in anywhere in any given text, especially in literary classics and poetry. Allusions can be **obvious** or **subtle** and difficult to notice as you read. **Detecting and understanding allusions** made in the course of in a text can change the **meaning, tone, or impact** of a text (or at least the passage containing the reference) in major or minor ways. Wherever possible, try to look up allusions as you encounter them so you can have a better sense of **what is being said or implied**. **Encyclopedias** and **literary criticism** can be very helpful here.
- If you come across **footnotes** (explanations at the bottom of a page) as you read, take a moment to review them since they can clarify how a word is used or provide historical facts or other important information.
- Check to see if **your library** offers **literary criticism books or literature databases** on the **author** and/or **title** you are reading. Literary criticism can help you learn and discover many interesting ideas within a text. Members of Thrall can freely access **literature databases** at www.thrall.org/databases
We also offer a **Literature resource guide** at www.thrall.org/literature
- **When reading a poem**, consider the following:
 - **Read the poem aloud** to hear the **sounds** and **rhythms** of its words.
 - See if the poem **rhymes** and if it has a “**rhyme scheme**” (a pattern of rhyming).
 - Try to pay close attention to **words and phrases** used throughout in a poem. Do any of them **repeat**?
 - Are the **poem's lines** arranged in groups of two or three or more? Are they evenly grouped or irregular?
 - Are there any obvious **comparisons** between two or more things (what we would call **similes**)?
 - Are there **metaphors** – **dissimilar** things compared **without the words** “**like**” or “**as**,” as in these two examples from William Shakespeare: “**the world is a stage**” and “**Juliet is the sun**” (note the word “**is**”)
 - Keep in mind **any “I” in the poem** can be a **character** (a “speaker”) and **not the poet**.
 - What is the overall **emotional tone** of the poem? Joyful, sorrowful, angry, pensive, unsure, inspired?
 - What do you think the poem **means**? How does it make you **feel**?
 - Try **rereading** a poem and see if you **notice anything new or feel differently** toward it.
 - See if you can **memorize** one or more **lines of poetry**. It can be challenging but fun to quote later on!
- **Reread a passage or a entire text whenever necessary.** Sometimes we must read something several times in order to understand what was said. Rereading can also help us get closer to a text, become more aware of its ideas and more comfortable with its words, and eventually help us remember a text.
- See if there are any **recognizable patterns** in a text: these can help you remember ideas and facts.
- Try **skimming a text** (such as an **article** or a **chapter in a textbook**) before reading through it so you can “**preview**” **key words and concepts** and approach the text with some awareness of **how it is arranged**.
- Consider keeping a **reading log** so you can **track what you read, take notes, paraphrase and memorize** ideas, write down **questions** you might have, and possibly to **record your reactions and interpretations**.
- **Don't just read: interpret**. What does a text **say and mean to you**, make you **think about, imagine**?
- **Use your imagination to envision ideas, characters, or settings**. Help the text come alive in your mind!
- **Read about an author** – the author’s **biography, autobiography** (if one exists), or encyclopedic articles to learn more about that writer’s life and times, influences, other literary efforts and related works, and more.
- Does a text contain a **Works Cited, Recommended Reading, or Bibliography**? If so, titles listed there can help you learn more about a topic and what other authors or works influenced the writer and text.
- Participate in **book discussions** and **reading groups**. Middletown Thrall Library and other public libraries offer **free book discussions** for the public throughout the year. You can simply attend, hear scholars and other readers relate their insights and questions – or you can contribute **your own comments and inquiries**.
- Use **free reader's advisory services** offered by Thrall and other public libraries to **locate authors similar to those you enjoy**, or to **discover new and interesting titles**. Thrall’s services include **Beyond the Bestsellers** (thrall.org/btb), **RAVES!** (thrall.org/raves), our **Booklovers** guide (thrall.org/booklovers), **Booklovers blog** (thrall.org/blogs), **Future Title Watch** (thrall.org/future), **personalized reading plans** (thrall.org/readingplan), **book displays**, a dedicated **Reader's Advisory Center** in the library, and more!