



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Good comprehension of a text involves not only understanding what the text itself is saying, but also understanding your own responses to it. If the subject matter is new to you or difficult for you, your first thought may be, "I have no thoughts of my own! I know *nothing* about this stuff! I only know what I'm *told*!" But even this is a response to the text, and a very honest one at that.

Your personal responses to a text are likely to be jumbled and unorganized at first, for example . . .

. . . questions about things you don't understand or don't believe.

. . . comments about what the author is saying.

. . . ideas for possible paper topics.

. . . connections between what you are reading and other things you have heard or read.

. . . wonderings, speculations, half-baked notions, whacky ideas.

. . . emotional reactions; excitement; boredom; disgust; confusion; fascination.

. . . criticisms of the author's methods or conclusions.

. . . examples or counterexamples from your own experience.

Far from being irrelevant or silly, these responses are an essential aspect of your learning. Answering examination questions, participating in classroom discussions, and writing papers all demand that you not only understand the course material but also express your own thinking about it. So it is important to try to monitor and articulate your responses to what you are reading.

The following question-prompt pairs can help:

- QUESTION** Which of the writer's assumptions or conclusions do you find yourself questioning?
PROMPT *When the writer assumes or concludes that . . . ,
I am skeptical because*
- QUESTION** What in the writer's reasoning do you not understand? What makes it hard for you to follow?
PROMPT *When the writer says . . . ,
I find it puzzling because*
- QUESTION** What remains unresolved for you, still? Why? What other questions do you think need to be asked?
PROMPT *I am still left wondering
The writer does not address the question*
- QUESTION** What, if anything, makes the writer's question hard to reckon with or difficult to resolve?
PROMPT *The writer's question is a difficult one to resolve because*
- QUESTION** Would you want to reframe the writer's question or take a different approach to addressing it?
If so, how?
PROMPT *The approach I would take in reframing or addressing this question is*
- QUESTION** What do you feel about what you are reading? What are your "gut reactions?"
PROMPT *When the author says . . . ,
I feel*