

to other people's statements that they don't listen to what the other person is saying. A well-known article on reading by the literary and educational theorist Robert Scholes suggests that people read badly because they substitute for the words on the page some association or predetermined idea that the words accidentally trigger in them. As a result, they replay their own perceptions rather than taking in the writer's actual words. (See Robert Scholes, "The Transition to College Reading," *Pedagogy*, volume 2, number 2, Duke UP, 2002, pp. 165–172.)

We will now survey a few techniques for focusing on individual sentences.

### POINTING

POINTING is a practice (associated with two writing theorists and master teachers, Peter Elbow and Sheridan Blau) in which members of a group take turns reading sentences aloud. POINTING provides a way of summarizing without generalizing, and it is one of the best ways to build community and to stimulate discussion (see Figure 2.1).

- 1 Select sentences from a reading that you are willing to voice.
- 2 Take turns reading individual sentences aloud. No one raises hands or comments on the sentences during the pointing. Read only one of your chosen sentences at a time. Later in the session, you may read again.
- 3 Let the recitation build. Some sentences repeat as refrains; others segue or answer previous sentences. POINTING usually lasts about five minutes and ends more or less naturally, when people no longer have sentences they wish to read.

**FIGURE 2.1**

### POINTING

POINTING stirs our memories about the particular language of a piece. In reading aloud, and hearing others read, you hear key words and discover questions you'd not noticed before; and the range of possible starting points for getting at what is central in the reading inevitably multiplies. POINTING is an antidote for the limiting assumption that a reading has only one main idea. It also remedies the tendency of group discussion to veer into general impressions and loose associations.

POINTING is most productive when participants focus on listening to others' sentences. Have everyone take notes about what they hear—the key words—as the POINTING proceeds. Once the activity is finished, class members can respond to the prompt "What did you hear?" by taking turns reading the key words aloud from their notes.

### Using Quotation


Quoting key words and sentences from a reading keeps you focused on specific words and ideas rather than general impressions. It is not enough, however, to quote key sentences from a reading without discussing what you take them to

mean, for what a sentence means is never self-evident. A mantra of this book is that analytical writers quote *in order* to analyze. That is, they follow up quotation by voicing what specifically they understand that quote to mean. The best way to arrive at that meaning is to paraphrase. (Some disciplines, it must be acknowledged, refrain from quoting and include only the paraphrase.) In any case, a quote alone cannot serve as your “answer” by itself; you can’t use a quote in place of your own active explanation of what a reading is saying. Quotes only help you to focus and launch that explanation. (For more on this subject, see Chapter 8.)

### PARAPHRASE × 3

Paraphrasing is one of the simplest and most overlooked ways of discovering ideas and stimulating interpretation. Like POINTING, PARAPHRASE × 3 seeks to locate you in the local, the particular, and the concrete rather than the global, the overly general, and the abstract. Rather than make a broad claim about what a sentence or passage says, a paraphrase stays much closer to the actual words.

The word “paraphrase” means to put one phrase next to (“para”) another phrase. When you recast a sentence or two—finding the best synonyms you can think of for the original language, translating it into a parallel statement—you are thinking about what the original words mean. The use of “× 3” (times 3) in our label is a reminder to paraphrase key words more than once, not settling too soon for a best synonym (see Figure 2.2).

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- 1 **Select a short passage** (as little as a single sentence or even a phrase) from whatever you are studying that you think is interesting, perhaps puzzling, and especially useful for understanding the material. Assume you *don't* understand it completely, even if you think you do.
  - 2 **Find synonyms for all of the key terms.** Don't just go for the gist, a loose approximation of what was said. Substitute language virtually word-for-word to produce a parallel version of the original statement.
  - 3 **Repeat this rephrasing several times** (we suggest three). This will produce a range of possible implications that the original passage may possess.
  - 4 **Contemplate the various versions you have produced.** Which seem most plausible as restatements of what the original piece intends to communicate?
  - 5 **Decide what you now recognize about the meaning of the original passage.** What do you now recognize about the passage on the basis of your repeated restatements? What now does the passage appear to mean? What implications have the paraphrasings revealed?

**FIGURE 2.2**

### PARAPHRASE × 3

When you paraphrase language, whether your own or language you encounter in your reading, you are not just defining terms but opening out the wide range of implications those words inevitably possess. When we read, it is easy to skip quickly over the words, assuming we know what they