



Chapter 2

Reading Comprehension

Before you can write your essay, you need to ensure that you understand the article. The first scoring category, “Critical Response to the Writing Task and Text,” states that you must “demonstrate understanding of the main ideas in the reading text.” This chapter is going to help you develop strategies so that you can completely understand the CATW passage. This, in turn, will help you write a thoughtful and focused essay response.

CATW Scoring Relevance: Critical Response (Argumentation); Organization; Development

READING FOR MEANING

A Note on Reading the CATW Passage

The writing starts with the reading; this test is in large part a reading comprehension exam. Know what to expect: a 300-word passage that (often, but not always) has a clearly stated thesis, with examples, facts, and research to support this thesis. You should **actively read the passage several times with a pen in hand**, looking up words in a dictionary, thinking about the topic and thesis, and taking notes in the margins in order to completely understand the reading selection. You will need to read the article closely in order to understand the author’s argument, distinguishing main points from supporting details and the author’s voice from people quoted for support. It is okay to spend 15 minutes doing this before you embark on your outline.

Look for examples, but more importantly, figure out what those examples illustrate. Always ask yourself: "Why does the author offer a particular story, quote, or statistic? What bigger point is s/he trying to prove?" Do not oversimplify the author's ideas or let your own views on the subject color whatever the author may be saying. You'll have plenty of room to explain your response to the author's ideas later in your essay.

Given the time limit, you might feel anxious if you're not writing your essay a few minutes into the test. However, remember that pre-writing will save you time in the long run. Therefore, have your pen at the ready! Annotate the passage, circle unfamiliar words and look them up, paraphrase the author in straightforward language, and write down your reactions.

READING STRATEGIES

1. Read the title, which can often provide important clues to the author's focus.
2. Scan the entire passage to get a sense of what it's about.
3. Read it once.
 - a. Underline any words you don't understand.
 - b. Put a star next to things that seem important and hearts or checks next to parts you liked.
 - c. Look up unfamiliar words.
4. Read the article a second time for understanding.
 - a. Underline the **main points**.
 - b. In the right margin, write comments, questions, and any connections you can make to the author's points.
 - c. Put "quotations" around phrases or sentences you might want to quote (these will be things that really stand out).
 - d. If you don't understand a certain sentence or phrase, look up unfamiliar words and try to piece together the author's meaning.
5. To the left of each paragraph, write the main idea **in your own words**.
6. At the top of the page, without looking at the passage, write down what you think is the author's thesis—the biggest central idea of the passage—in your own words. After this, look at your main ideas. If they all support the thesis, chances are your analysis is correct!

By the end of this process, the passage should be completely marked up. You should have underlined or circled important ideas, highlighted significant quotations, and recorded the author's main points in one margin, your own comments and questions in the opposite margin, and your thesis at the top of the page. Feel free to add your own symbols! Also, if you do not have enough space for these notations, work on a piece of scrap paper beside the passage.

Excerpted from *New York's Pushout Crisis: Why Students Don't Graduate*

by **Emily Shaw, Liz Sullivan and Refat Shoshi Chowdhury**

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Luke was supposed to receive his high school diploma this year, but, like many others, he did not. A 16-year-old student, he was placed in special education with a label of “emotional disturbance.” Luke was attending a high school in District 75, the citywide district for special education, where students with disabilities are isolated from their peers without disabilities. It was not where Luke was supposed to be . . .

Luke, according to the Individualized Education Program that all special education students have, should have attended an inclusive high school, where students with disabilities learn in classrooms with other students. Studies have found that this generally leads to better academic performance and behavior. But at the last minute, the Department of Education informed Luke’s mother that the school he was slated to attend was too crowded. The department sent Luke to the District 75 school, South Richmond High School on Staten Island, where he faced many difficulties. Rather than receive counseling and support, Luke encountered school safety officers who were derogatory and judgmental, and teachers who escalated conflicts rather than mediated them.

On Jan. 15, 2010, Luke had a verbal dispute with a student in class, and his teacher asked him to leave the room. On his way out, another teacher told Luke he couldn’t be in the hallway. Luke explained that he wasn’t allowed back in class and tried to push past the teacher. Luke and his mother have said that the teacher then pinned Luke against the wall prompting a school safety officer to physically restrain and arrest Luke, leaving visible marks in the process . . .

A recent study by the Council of State Governments on school disciplinary practices in Texas underscores just how detrimental suspension and expulsion can be. Over 60 percent of all students between grades 7 and 12 in Texas were suspended at least once. Students who are suspended or expelled are six times more likely to be held back at least one grade, and five times more likely to drop out than their peers, according to the report . . .

There are certainly many factors to consider in the fight to end school pushout, but the bottom line is that the school community, student behavior and academic success are inextricably linked. We must reduce suspensions and student arrests, and implement positive alternatives so that students feel valued and are not removed from school for extended periods of time . . .

From “New York’s Pushout Crisis: Why Students Don’t Graduate” by Emily Shaw, Liz Sullivan and Refat Shoshi Chowdhury, Gotham Gazette, September 27, 2011, www.gothamgazette.com.