

A CATALOG OF CRITICAL READING STRATEGIES

Serious study of a text requires a pencil in hand—how much pride that pencil carries.

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Here we present fourteen specific strategies for reading critically, strategies that you can learn readily and then apply not only to the selections in this text but also to your other college reading. Mastering these strategies may not make the critical reading process any easier, but it can make reading much more satisfying and productive and thus help you handle difficult material with confidence. These strategies are

- *Annotating*: recording your reactions to and questions about a text directly on the page
- *Previewing*: learning about a text before reading it closely
- *Outlining*: listing the main idea of each paragraph in your own words
- *Summarizing*: relying on your own words to present the main ideas
- *Paraphrasing*: relying on your own words to restate and clarify the meaning
- *Questioning to understand and remember*: asking questions about the content
- *Contextualizing*: placing a text in its historical and cultural contexts
- *Reflecting on challenges to your beliefs and values*: examining your responses to reveal your own unexamined assumptions and attitudes
- *Exploring the significance of figurative language*: seeing how metaphors, similes, and symbols enhance meaning
- *Looking for patterns of opposition*: discovering what a text values by analyzing its system of oppositions
- *Evaluating the logic of an argument*: testing the logic of a text to see if it makes sense

- *Recognizing emotional manipulation*: looking for false or exaggerated appeals
- *Judging the writer's credibility*: determining whether what a writer says can be trusted
- *Comparing and contrasting related readings*: exploring likenesses and differences between texts to understand them better

ANNOTATING

For each of these strategies, annotating directly on the page—underlining key words, phrases, or sentences; writing comments or questions in the margins; bracketing important sections of the text; connecting ideas with lines or arrows; numbering related points in sequence; making note of anything that strikes you as interesting, important, or questionable—is fundamental. (If writing on the text itself is impossible or undesirable, you can annotate on a photocopy.)

Most readers annotate in layers, adding further annotations on second and third readings. Annotations can be light or heavy, depending on the reader's purpose and the difficulty of the material. You will annotate some of the essays in this book heavily to analyze the rhetorical features each writer uses as well as to explore the writer's ideas and your reactions to them. (Chapter 1 discusses annotating in greater detail.)

For several of the strategies, you will need to build on and extend annotating by *taking inventory*: analyzing and classifying your annotations, searching systematically for patterns in the text, and interpreting their significance. An inventory is basically a list. When you take inventory, you make various kinds of lists in order to find meaning in a text.

As you review your annotations on a particular reading, you may discover that the language and ideas cluster in various ways. Inventorying annotations is a three-step process:

1. Examine your annotations for patterns or repetitions of any kind, such as recurring images or stylistic features, related words and phrases, similar examples, or reliance on authorities.
2. Try out different ways of grouping the items.
3. Consider what the patterns you have found suggest about the meaning or writer's rhetorical choices.

The patterns you discover will depend on the kind of reading you are analyzing and on the purpose of your analysis. (See Exploring the Significance of Figurative Language and Looking for Patterns of Oppositions in this appendix for examples of inventorying annotations.)

The following selection has been annotated to demonstrate the kinds of thinking and annotating required by the critical reading strategies we describe in the rest of this catalog. As you read about each strategy, you will be referred back to this annotated example.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

AN ANNOTATED SAMPLE FROM "LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL,"

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968) first came to national notice in 1955, when he led a successful boycott against back-of-the-bus seating of African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, where he was minister of a Baptist church. He subsequently formed a national organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, that brought people of all races from all over the country to the South to fight nonviolently for racial integration. In 1963, King led demonstrations in Birmingham that were met with violence: a black church was bombed, killing four little girls. King was arrested and, while in prison, wrote the famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail" to answer local clergy's criticism. (The complete text of King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" followed by the clergy-men's published criticism appears at the end of this appendix.)

The following brief reading selection is excerpted from the letter and annotated to illustrate some of the ways you can annotate as you read. Since annotating is the first step for all critical reading strategies in this catalog, these annotations are referred to throughout this appendix. Add your own annotations in the right-hand margin. King begins by discussing his disappointment with the lack of support he received from white moderates, such as the group of clergy who published their criticism in the local newspaper.

... I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's [great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom] is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who gatematically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. [Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.]

⁴² Tension necessary for progress

⁴¹ White moderates block progress
order vs. justice
negative vs. positive
ends vs. means
treating others like children

dams that block the flow of social progress.] I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an [obnoxious negative peace,] in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a [substantive and positive peace,] in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. [Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.]

Tension
already exists

Simile: hidden
tension like a
boil
True?

In your statement you assert that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But is this a logical assertion? Isn't this like condemning [a robbed man] because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery? Isn't this like condemning [Socrates] because his unswerving commitment to truth and his philosophical inquiries precipitated the act by the misguided populace in which they made him drink hemlock? Isn't this like condemning [Jesus] because his unique God-consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to God's will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion? We must come to see that, as the federal courts have consistently affirmed, it is wrong to urge an individual to cease his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the question may precipitate violence. [Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber.]

Yes!

¶4. Justifies
urgency

Quotes white
moderate as
example

Critiques
assumptions

Silence
as bad as
hateful words
and actions
not moving

in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.] Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending [national (elegy)] into a creative [psalm] of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the [quicksand of racial injustice] to the [solid rock of human dignity.]

You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist. I began thinking about the fact that I stand in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community.

One is a [force of complacency,] made up in part of Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, are so drained of self-respect and a sense of "somebodiness" that they have adjusted to segregation; and in part of a few middle-class Negroes, who because of a degree of academic and economic security and because in some ways they profit by segregation, have become insensitive to the problems of the masses. The other [force is one of bitterness and hatred,] and it comes perilously close to advocating violence. It is expressed in the various black nationalist [groups that are springing up] across the nation, the largest and best-known being Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement. Nourished by the Negro's frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination, this movement is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incorrigible "devil."

Complacency
vs. hatred

Malcolm X?

I have tried to stand between these two forces, saying that we need emulate neither the "do-nothingism" of the complacent nor the hatred and despair of the black nationalist. For there is the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest. I am grateful to God that, through the influence of the Negro church, the way of nonviolence became an integral part of our struggle.

¶6. Claims to
offer better
choice

¶7. Claims his
movement pre-
vents racial
violence.

If . . . Then . . .
Veiled threat?

¶8. Change
inevitable: evo-
lution or revo-
lution?

spirit of the
times
Worldwide
uprising
against
injustice

If this philosophy had not emerged, by now many streets of the South would, I am convinced, be flowing with blood. And I am further convinced that if our white brothers dismiss as "rabble-rousers" and "outside agitators" those of us who employ nonviolent direct action, and if they refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes will, out of frustration and despair, seek solace and security in black-nationalist ideologies—a development that would inevitably lead to a frightening racial nightmare.

[Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever.] The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself, and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the Zeitgeist, and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America and the Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the [promised land of racial justice.] If one recog-

Why "he," not
"she"?
Repeats "let
him"

Not *apologetic*?
"offhanded
discontent"

§9 Justifies
extremism for
righteous ends

Hebrew
prophet
disciple
founded
Protes-
tantism
preacher
freed slaves

wrote
Declaration of
Independence

Redeemer—
all extremists
for good

§10
Disappointed
in white
moderate
critics;
thanks
supporters

nizes this [vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community,] one should readily understand why public demonstrations are taking place. The Negro has many [pent-up resentments] and latent frustrations, and he must release them. So let him march, let him make prayer pilgrimages to the city hall, let him go on freedom rides—and try to understand why he must do so. If his repressed emotions are not released in nonviolent ways, they will seek expression through violence; this is not a threat but a fact of history. So I have not said to my people: "Get rid of your discontent." Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be [channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action.] And now this approach is being termed extremist.

But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God." And John Bunyan: "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience." And Abraham Lincoln: "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." And Thomas Jefferson: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal . . ." [So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be.] Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime—the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, [the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.]

I had hoped that the white moderate would see this need. Perhaps I was too optimistic; perhaps I expected too much. I suppose I should have realized that few members of the oppressor race can understand the deep groans and passionate yearnings of the oppressed race, and still fewer have the vision to see that [injustice must be rooted out] by strong, persistent and determined action. I am thankful, however, that some of our white brothers in the South have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it. They are still all too few in quantity, but they are big in quality. Some—such as Ralph McGill, Lillian Smith, Harry Golden,

Who are they?

It's unaided

framing—
recalls boil
simile

James McBride Dabbs, Ann Braden and Sarah Patton Boyle—have written about our struggle in eloquent and prophetic terms. Others have marched with us down nameless streets of the South. They have [anguished] in filthy, roach-infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of policemen who view them as "dirty nigger-lovers." Unlike so many of their moderate brothers and sisters, they have recognized the urgency of the movement and sensed the need for powerful ["action" antidotes] to combat the [disease of segregation].

CHECKLIST

Annotating

To annotate:

1. Mark the text using notations like these:
 - circle words to be defined in the margin
 - underline key words and phrases
 - bracket importance sentences and passages
 - use lines or arrows to connect ideas or words
2. Write marginal comments like these:
 - number and summarize each paragraph
 - define unfamiliar words
 - note responses and questions
 - identify interesting writing strategies
 - point out patterns
3. Layer additional markings on the text and comments in the margins as you reread for different purposes.

PREVIEWING

Previewing enables readers to get a sense of what the text is about and how it is organized before reading it closely. This simple critical reading strategy includes seeing what you can learn from headlines or other introductory material, skimming to get an overview of the content and organization, and identifying the genre and rhetorical situation.

Learning from Headnotes

Many texts provide some introductory material to orient readers. Books often have brief blurbs on the cover describing the content and author, as well as a preface, an introduction, and a table of contents. Articles in professional and academic journals usually provide some background information. Scientific

articles, for example, typically begin with an abstract summarizing the main points. In this book, as in many textbooks, headnotes introducing the author and identifying the circumstances under which the selection was originally published precede the reading selections.

You might want to annotate the headnotes in this book, highlighting whatever seems important and adding your own information, observations, or questions. For example, as you read the headnote to the excerpt from "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (p. 417), you might want to underscore the fact that the selection is an excerpt from a longer essay. You might also note that it was written in response to published criticism.

Because Martin Luther King, Jr., is a well-known figure, the headnote may not tell you anything you did not already know. If you know something else about the author that could help you better understand the selection, you might want to make a note of it. As a critical reader, you should think about whether the writer has authority and credibility on the subject. Information about the writer's education, professional experience, and other publications can help. If you need to know more about a particular author, you could consult a biographical dictionary or encyclopedia in the library, such as *Who's Who*, *Biographical Index*, *Current Biography*, *Dictionary of American Biography*, or *Contemporary Authors*.

Skimming for an Overview

When you *skim* a text, you give it a quick, selective, superficial reading. For most explanations and arguments, a good strategy is to read the opening and closing paragraphs because the first usually introduces the subject and may forecast the main points, while the last typically summarizes what is most important in the essay. You should also glance at the first sentence of every internal paragraph because it may serve as a topic sentence, introducing the point discussed in the paragraph. Because narrative writing is usually organized by time rather than by points, often you can get a sense of the progression by skimming for time markers such as *then*, *after*, and *later*. Heads and subheads, figures and charts, also provide clues for skimming.

To illustrate, turn again to the King excerpt, and skim it. Notice that the opening paragraph establishes the subject: the white moderate's criticism of Dr. King's efforts. It also forecasts many of the main points that are taken up in subsequent paragraphs: the moderate's greater devotion to order than to justice (paragraph 2); the moderate's criticism that King's methods, though nonviolent, precipitate violence (paragraph 3); and the moderate's "paternalistic" timetable (paragraph 4), and so on.

Identifying the Genre and Rhetorical Situation

Reading an unfamiliar text is like traveling in unknown territory. Wise travelers use a map, checking what they see against what they expect to find. In much

the same way, previewing for genre equips you with a set of expectations to guide your reading. *Genre* means "kind" or "type," and is generally used to classify pieces of writing according to their particular style, form, and content. Nonfiction prose genres include autobiography, reflection, observation, explanations of concepts, and various forms of argument, such as evaluation, analysis of causes or effects, proposal to solve a problem, and position on a controversial issue. These genres are illustrated in chapters 2 through 9 with guidelines to help you analyze and evaluate their effectiveness. After working through these chapters, you will be able to identify the genre of most unfamiliar pieces of writing you encounter.

You can make a tentative decision about the genre of a text by first looking at why the piece was written and to whom it was addressed. These two elements—purpose and audience—constitute the rhetorical or writing situation. Paying attention to the genre of a particular text leads you to consider how the writing situation affected the particular way the text was written. The title "Letter from Birmingham Jail" explicitly identifies this particular selection as a letter. We know that letters are usually written with a particular reader in mind, although they may be addressed to the public in general; that they may be part of an ongoing correspondence; and that they may be personal or public, informal or formal.

If you read the clergymen's statement (pp. 465–466) and the opening of King's letter (p. 452), you will gain some insight into the situation in which he wrote the letter and some understanding of his specific purpose for writing. As a public letter written in response to a public statement, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" may be classified as a position paper, one that argues for a particular position on a controversial issue.

Even without reading the clergymen's statement and the complete letter, you can get a sense of the rhetorical situation from the opening paragraph of the excerpt. You would not be able to identify the "white moderate" with the clergymen who criticized King, but you would see clearly that he is referring to people he had hoped would support his cause but who, instead, have become an obstacle. King's feelings about the white moderate's lack of support are evident in the first paragraph based on his use of words like *gravely disappointed*, *regrettable conclusion*, *frustrating*, and *bewildering*. The opening paragraph, as we indicated under Skimming for an Overview, also identifies the white moderate's specific objections to King's methods. Therefore, you not only learn very quickly that this is a position paper, but you also learn the points of disagreement between the two sides and the attitude of the writer toward those with whom he disagrees.

Knowing that this is an excerpt from a position paper allows you to appreciate the controversiality of the subject King is writing about and the sensitivity of the rhetorical situation. You can see how he presents his own position at the same time that he tries to bridge the gap separating him from his critics. You can then evaluate the kinds of points King makes and the persuasiveness of his argument.

CHECKLIST

Previewing

To orient yourself before reading closely,

1. See what you can learn from headlines or other introductory material.
2. Skim the text to get an overview of the content and organization.
3. Identify the genre and rhetorical situation.

OUTLINING

Outlining is an especially helpful critical reading strategy for understanding the content and structure of a reading. *Outlining*, which identifies the text's main ideas, may be part of the annotating process, or it may be done separately. Writing an outline in the margins of the text as you read and annotate makes it easier to find information later. Writing an outline on a separate piece of paper gives you more space to work with and therefore usually includes more detail.

The key to outlining is distinguishing between the main ideas and the supporting material such as reasons, examples, factual evidence, and explanations. The main ideas form the backbone, which holds the various parts and pieces of the text together. Outlining the main ideas helps you uncover this structure.

Making an outline, however, is not simple. The reader must exercise judgment in deciding which are the most important ideas. Because importance is relative, different readers can make different—and equally reasonable—decisions based on what interests them in the reading. Outlining may be further complicated when readers use their own words rather than select words from the text. Rephrasing can create a slight or significant shift in meaning or emphasis. Reading is never a passive or neutral act; the process of outlining shows how constructive reading can be.

You may make either a formal, multileveled outline with Roman (I, II) and Arabic (1, 2) numerals together with capital and lowercase letters or an informal, scratch outline that lists the main idea of each paragraph. A formal outline is harder to make and much more time consuming than a scratch outline. You might choose to make a formal outline of a reading about which you are writing an in-depth analysis or evaluation. For example, here is a formal outline a student wrote for a paper evaluating the logic of the King excerpt. Notice that the student uses Roman numerals for the main ideas or claims, capital letters for the reasons, and Arabic numerals for supporting evidence and explanation.

- I. The Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is . . . the white moderate
 - A. Because the white moderate is more devoted to "order" than to justice (paragraph 2)

1. Law and order should exist to establish justice
2. Likens law and order to dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress
- B. Because the white moderate prefers a negative peace (absence of tension) to a positive peace (justice) (paragraph 2)
 1. The tension already exists
 2. It is not created by nonviolent direct action
 3. Boil simile: Compares society that does not eliminate injustice to a boil that hides its infections. Both can be cured only by exposure.
- C. Because even though the white moderate agrees with the goals, he does not support the means to achieve them (paragraph 3)
 1. Rebutts the argument that the means—nonviolent direct action—are wrong because they precipitate violence
 2. Analogy of the robbed man condemned because he had money
 3. Comparison with Socrates and Jesus
- D. Because the white moderate paternalistically believes he can set a timetable for another man's freedom (paragraph 4)
 1. Rebutts the white moderate's argument that Christianity will cure man's ills and man must wait patiently for that to happen
 2. Argues that time is neutral and that man must use time creatively for constructive rather than destructive ends
- II. Creative extremism is preferable to moderation
 - A. Classifies himself as a moderate (paragraphs 5–8)
 1. I stand between two forces: the white moderate's complacency and the Black Muslim's rage
 2. If nonviolent direct action were stopped, more violence, not less, would result
 3. "Millions of Negroes will, out of frustration and despair, seek solace and security in black-nationalist ideologies" (paragraph 7)
 4. Repressed emotions will be expressed—if not in nonviolent ways, then through violence (paragraph 8)
 - B. Redefines himself as a "creative extremist" (paragraph 9)
 1. Extremism for love, truth, and goodness is creative extremism
 2. Identifies himself with creative extremists like Jesus, Amos, Paul, Martin Luther, John Bunyan, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson
 - C. Not all white people are moderates, many are creative extremists (paragraph 10)
 1. Lists names of white writers
 2. Refers to white activists

Making a scratch outline, in contrast to a formal outline, takes less time but still requires careful reading. A scratch outline will not record as much information as a formal outline, but it is sufficient for most critical reading purposes. To make a scratch outline, you need to locate the topic of each paragraph. The topic is usually stated in a word or phrase, and it may be repeated or referred to throughout the paragraph. For example, the opening paragraph of the King excerpt (p. 417) makes clear that its topic is the white moderate.

After you have found the topic of the paragraph, figure out what is being said about it. To return to our example: If the white moderate is the topic of the opening paragraph, then what King says about the topic can be found in the second sentence, where he announces the conclusion he has come to—namely, that the white moderate is “the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom.” The rest of the paragraph specifies the ways the white moderate blocks progress.

When you make an outline, you can use the writer’s words, your own words, or a combination of the two. An outline appears in the margins of the selection, with numbers for each paragraph (see pp. 417–421). Here is the same outline on a separate piece of paper, slightly expanded and reworded:

- ¶1 White moderates block progress in the struggle for racial justice
- ¶2 Tension is necessary for progress
- ¶3 The clergymen’s criticism is not logical
- ¶4 King justifies urgent use of time
- ¶5 Clergymen accuse King of being extreme, but he claims to stand between two extreme forces in the black community
- ¶6 King offers a better choice
- ¶7 King’s movement has prevented racial violence by blacks
- ¶8 Discontent is normal and healthy but must be channeled creatively rather than destructively
- ¶9 Creative extremists are needed
- ¶10 Some whites have supported King

CHECKLIST

Outlining

To make a scratch outline of a text,

1. Reread each paragraph systematically, identifying the topic and what is being said about it. Do not include examples, specific details, quotations, or other explanatory and supporting material.
2. List the main ideas in the margin of the text or on a separate piece of paper.

SUMMARIZING

Summarizing is one of the most widely used strategies for critical reading because it helps the reader understand and remember what is most important in the reading. Another advantage of summarizing is that it creates a condensed version of the reading’s ideas and information, which can be referred to later or inserted into the reader’s own written text. Along with quoting and paraphrasing, summarizing enables us to refer to and integrate other writers’ ideas into our own writing.

A summary is a relatively brief restatement, in the reader’s own words, of the reading’s main ideas. Summaries vary in length, depending on the reader’s purpose. Some summaries are very brief—a sentence or even a subordinate clause. For example, if you were referring to the excerpt from “Letter from Birmingham Jail” and simply needed to indicate how it relates to your other sources, your summary might focus on only one aspect of the reading. It might look something like this: “There have always been advocates of extremism in politics. Martin Luther King, Jr., in ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail,’ for instance, defends nonviolent civil disobedience as an extreme but necessary means of bringing about racial justice.” If, on the other hand, you were surveying the important texts of the civil rights movement, you might write a longer, more detailed summary that not only identifies the reading’s main ideas but also shows how the ideas relate to one another.

Many writers find it useful to outline the reading as a preliminary to writing a summary. A paragraph-by-paragraph scratch outline (like that illustrated on p. 426) lists the reading’s main ideas following the sequence in which they appear in the original. But writing a summary requires more than merely stringing together the entries in an outline. A summary has to make explicit the logical connections between the ideas. To write a summary, you do more than translate the author’s meaning into your own words, as you would when writing a phrase (see pp. 428–429). Writing a summary shows how reading critically is a truly constructive process of interpretation involving both close analysis and creative synthesis.

To summarize, you need to segregate the main ideas from the supporting material, usually by making an outline of the reading. You will want to use your own words for the most part, but you may use key words or quote selected key words and phrases. You may also want to cite the title and refer to the author by name, indicating with verbs like *expresses*, *acknowledges*, and *explains* the writer’s purpose and strategy at each point in the argument.

Following is a sample summary of the King excerpt. It is based on the outline on p. 426, but is much more detailed. Most important, it fills in connections between the ideas that King left for readers to make.

King expresses his disappointment with white moderates who, by opposing his program of nonviolent direct action, have become a barrier to progress toward racial justice. He acknowledges that his

program has raised tension in the South, but he explains that tension is necessary to bring about change. Furthermore, he argues that tension already exists. But because it has been unexpressed, it is unhealthy and potentially dangerous.

He defends his actions against the clergymen's criticisms, particularly their argument that he is in too much of a hurry. Responding to charges of extremism, King claims that he has actually prevented racial violence by channeling the natural frustrations of oppressed blacks into nonviolent protest. He asserts that extremism is precisely what is needed now—but it must be creative, rather than destructive, extremism. He concludes by again expressing disappointment with white moderates for not joining his effort as many other whites have.

CHECKLIST

Summarizing

- To restate briefly the main ideas in a text,
1. Make an outline.
 2. Write a paragraph or more that presents the main ideas largely in your own words. Use the outline as a guide, but reread parts of the original text as necessary.
 3. To make the summary coherent, fill in connections between ideas.

PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing, like summarizing, involves putting what you have read into your own words. But unlike a summary, which is much briefer than the original text, a paraphrase is at least as long as the original and often longer. Whereas summarizing seeks to present the gist or essence of the reading and leave out everything else, paraphrasing tries to be comprehensive and leave out nothing that contributes to the meaning. (For more on summarizing, see pp. 427–428.)

Paraphrasing works as a critical reading strategy for especially complex and obscure passages. Because it requires a word-for-word or phrase-by-phrase rewording of the original text, paraphrasing is too time consuming and labor intensive to use on long texts. But it is perfect for making sure you understand the important passages of a difficult reading. To paraphrase, you need to work systematically through the text, looking up in a good college dictionary many of the key words, even those you are somewhat familiar with. You can quote the author's words, but if you do, put quotation marks around them and be sure to define them. You may also refer, as you do when you summarize, to the author by name and use verbs like *writes*, *expresses*, and *argues* to indicate your understanding of the author's purpose.

Following are two passages. The first is excerpted from paragraph two of the excerpt from "Letter from Birmingham Jail." The second passage paraphrases the first.

ORIGINAL

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality.

PARAPHRASE

King writes that he had hoped for more understanding from the white moderate—specifically that he would recognize that law and order is not an end in itself but a means to the greater end of establishing justice. When law and order do not serve this greater end, they stand in the way of progress. King expected the white moderate to recognize that the current tense situation in the South is part of a transition process that is necessary for progress. The current situation is bad because although there is peace, it is an "obnoxious" and "negative" kind of peace based on black people passively accepting the injustice of the status quo. A better kind of peace, one that is "substantive," real and not imaginary, as well as "positive" requires that all people, regardless of race, be valued.

If you compare the paraphrase to the original, you will see that the paraphrase tries to remain true to the original by including *all* the important information and ideas. It also tries to be neutral, to avoid inserting the reader's opinions or distorting the original writer's ideas. But because paraphrasing requires the use of different words and putting those words together into different sentences, the resulting paraphrase will be different from the original. The paraphrase expresses the reader's interpretation of the original text's meaning.

QUESTIONING TO UNDERSTAND AND REMEMBER

As students, we are accustomed to teachers asking us questions about our reading. These questions are designed to help us understand a reading and respond to it more fully, and often they work. When you need to understand and use new information, however, it may be more beneficial if *you* write the questions. Using this strategy, you can write questions as you read a text the first time. In difficult

academic reading, you will understand the material better and remember it longer if you write a question for every paragraph or brief section.

CHECKLIST

Paraphrasing

To paraphrase information in a text,

1. Reread the passage to be paraphrased, looking up unknown words in a college dictionary.
2. Translate the passage into your own words, putting quotation marks around any words or phrases quoted from the original.
3. Revise to ensure coherence.

We will demonstrate how this strategy works by returning to the excerpt from "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (pp. 417–421) and examining, paragraph by paragraph, some questions that might be written about it.

Reread the selection. When you come to the end of each paragraph, look at the question for that paragraph in the following list. (The paragraph numbers and questions correspond.) Assume for this rereading that the goal is to comprehend the information and ideas.

Notice that each question asks about the content of a paragraph and that you can answer the question with information from that paragraph.

Paragraph	Question
1	How can white moderates be more of a barrier to racial equality than the Ku Klux Klan?
2	How can community tension resulting from nonviolent direct action benefit the civil rights movement?
3	How can peaceful actions be justified even if they cause violence?
4	Why should civil rights activists take action now instead of waiting for white moderates to support them?
5	How are complacent members of the community different from black nationalist groups?
6	What is King's position in relation to these two forces of complacency and anger?
7	What would have happened if King's nonviolent direct action movement had not started?
8	What is the focus of the protest, and what do King and others who are protesting hope to achieve?

- 9 What other creative extremists does King associate himself with?
- 10 Who are the whites who have supported King and what has happened to some of them?

Each question focuses on the main idea in the paragraph, not on illustrations or details. Each question is expressed in the reader's own words, not just copied from parts of the paragraph.

How can writing questions during reading help you understand and remember the content—the ideas and information—of the reading? Researchers studying the ways people learn from their reading have found that writing questions during reading enables readers to remember more than they would by reading the selection twice. Researchers also compared readers who wrote brief summary sentences for a paragraph with readers who wrote questions and discovered that readers who wrote questions learned more and remembered the information longer. These researchers conjecture that writing a question involves reviewing or rehearsing information in a way that allows it to enter long-term memory, where it is more easily recalled. The result is that you clarify and "file" the information as you go along. You can then read more confidently because nothing important gets by you and meaning develops more fully, enabling you to predict what is coming next and add it readily to what you have already learned.

This way of reading informational material is very slow, and at first it may seem inefficient. In those reading situations where you must use the information in an exam or class discussion, it can be very efficient, however. Because this reading strategy is relatively time consuming, you would, of course, want to use it selectively.

CHECKLIST

Questioning to Understand and Remember

When you must remember and use your reading, especially if it is unfamiliar or difficult,

1. Pause at the end of each paragraph to review the information.
2. Try to identify the most important information—the main ideas or gist.
3. Write a question that can be answered by the main idea or ideas in the paragraph.
4. Move on to the next paragraph, and repeat the process.

CONTEXTUALIZING

The texts you read were all written sometime in the past and often embody historical and cultural assumptions, values, and attitudes different from your own. To read critically, you need to become aware of these differences.

Contextualizing is a critical reading strategy that enables you to make inferences about a reading selection's historical and cultural context and to examine the differences between its context and your own.

We can divide the process of contextualizing into two steps:

1. Reread the text to see how it represents the historical and cultural situation. Compare the way the text presents the situation with what you know about the situation from other sources—such as what you've read in other books and articles, what you have learned in school, what you have seen on television and in the movies, what you have learned from talking to people who might have been involved directly.

Write a few sentences, describing your understanding of what it was like at that particular time and place. Note how the representation of the time and place in the text differs in significant ways from the other representations with which you are familiar.

2. Consider how much and in what ways the situation has changed. Write another sentence or two, exploring the historical and cultural differences.

The excerpt from "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is a good example of a text that benefits from being read contextually. If you knew nothing about the history of slavery and segregation in the United States, if you had not heard of Martin Luther King, Jr., or the civil rights movement, it would be very difficult to understand the passion for justice and impatience with delay expressed in this selection. Most Americans, however, have read about Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement or have seen television histories like "Eyes on the Prize" or films like *Malcolm X*.

Here is how one reader contextualized the excerpt from "Letter from Birmingham Jail":

1. I am not old enough to remember what it was like in the early 1960s when Dr. King was leading marches and sit-ins, but I have seen television documentaries of newsclips showing demonstrators being attacked by dogs, doused by fire hoses, beaten and dragged by helmeted police. Such images give me a sense of the violence, fear, and hatred that King was responding to.

The tension King writes about comes across in his writing. He uses his anger and frustration creatively to inspire his critics. He also threatens them, although he denies it. I saw a film on Malcolm X, so I could see that King was giving white people a choice between his nonviolent way and Malcolm's more confrontational way.

2. Things have certainly changed since the sixties. Legal segregation has ended. The term Negro is no longer used, but there still are racists like the detective in the O. J. case. African Americans like General Colin Powell are highly respected and powerful. The civil rights movement is over. So when I read King, I'm reading history.

But then again, police officers still beat black men like Rodney King and extremists like Ice T still threaten violence. I don't know who's playing Dr. King's role today (Jesse Jackson?).

CHECKLIST

Contextualizing

- To contextualize,
1. Describe the historical and cultural situation as it is represented in the reading selection and in other sources with which you are familiar.
 2. Write about differences and the similarities you see.

REFLECTING ON CHALLENGES TO YOUR BELIEFS AND VALUES

The reading we do often challenges our attitudes, our unconsciously held beliefs, or our positions on current issues. We may feel anxious, irritable, or disturbed; threatened or vulnerable; ashamed or combative. We may feel suddenly wary or alert. When we experience these feelings as we read, we are reacting in terms of our personal or family values, religious beliefs, race or ethnic group, gender, sexual orientation, social class, or regional experience.

You can grow intellectually, emotionally, and in social understanding if you are willing (at least occasionally) to reflect on these challenges instead of simply resisting them. Learning to question your own unexamined assumptions and attitudes is an important part of becoming a critical thinker.

This reading strategy involves marking the text where you feel challenged, and then reflecting on why you feel challenged. As you read a text for the first time, simply mark an X in the margin at each point where you feel a challenge to your attitudes, beliefs, or values. Make a brief note in the margin about what you feel at that point or about what in the text seems to have created the challenge. The challenge you feel may be mild or strong. It may come frequently or only occasionally. You may feel challenged by any of the following:

- an offensive word used by the writer or quoted from a source
- an example, description, action, or asserted fact that distorts or stereotypes
- an unsubstantiated, oversimplified, or self-serving idea in the text

Review the places you marked in the text where you felt challenged and consider what connections you can make among these places or among the feelings you experienced at each place. For example, you might notice that you object to only a limited part of a writer's argument, resist nearly all of an authority's quoted statements, or react to implied judgments about your own gender or social class.

Write about what you learn. Begin by describing briefly the part or parts of the text that make you feel challenged. Then write several sentences, reflecting

on your responses. Keep the focus on your feelings. You need not defend or justify your feelings. Instead, try to account for them. Where do they come from? Why are they important to you? Although the purpose is to explore why you feel as you do, you may find that you can return to the text toward the end of your writing to think about how your values, attitudes, and beliefs influenced the way you understood as well as responded to the text.

Here, for example, is how one writer responded to "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (pp. 417–421).

I'm troubled and confused by the way King uses the labels *moderate* and *extremist*. He says he doesn't like being labeled an extremist but he labels the clergymen moderate. How could it be OK for King to be moderate and not OK for the clergymen? What does *moderate* mean anyway? My dictionary defines *moderate* as "keeping within reasonable or proper limits; not extreme, excessive, or intense." Being a moderate sounds a lot better than being an extremist. I was taught not to act rashly or to go off the deep end. I'm also troubled that King makes a threat (although he says he does not).

CHECKLIST

Reflecting on Challenges to Your Beliefs and Values

1. Identify challenges by annotating the text, marking each point where you feel your beliefs and values are being opposed, criticized, or unfairly characterized.
2. Select one or two of the most troubling challenges you've identified and write a few sentences trying to understand why you feel as you do. Don't defend your feelings; but instead analyze them to see where they come from.

EXPLORING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Figurative language (metaphor, simile, and symbol), which takes words literally associated with one object or idea and transforms them to another object or idea, communicates more than direct statement can convey. Such language enhances meaning because it embodies abstract ideas in vivid images. Figurative language also enriches meaning by drawing on a complex of feeling and association, indicating relations of resemblance and likeness. Here are definitions and examples of the most common figures of speech.

Metaphor implicitly compares two different things by identifying them with each other. For instance, when King in the selection on pp. 417–421 calls the white moderate "the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward

freedom" (paragraph 1), he does not mean that the white moderate literally trips the Negro who is attempting to walk toward freedom. The sentence makes sense only if understood figuratively: the white moderate trips up the Negro by frustrating every effort to eliminate injustice. Similarly, King uses the image of a dam to express the abstract idea of the blockage of justice (paragraph 2).

Simile, a more explicit form of comparison, uses *like* or *as* to signal the relation of two seemingly unrelated things. King uses simile when he says that injustice is "like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up" (paragraph 2). This simile makes several points of comparison between injustice and a boil. It suggests that injustice is a disease of society as a boil is a disease of the body and that injustice, like a boil, must be exposed or it will fester and worsen. *Symbolism* compares two things by making one stand for the other. King uses the white moderate as a symbol for supposed liberals and would-be supporters of civil rights who are actually frustrating the cause.

How these figures of speech are used in a text reveals something of the writer's feelings about the subject and attitude toward prospective readers. It may even suggest the writer's feelings about the act of writing. Annotating and taking inventory of patterns of figurative language can provide insight into the tone of the writing and emotional effect of the text on its readers.

Exploring the patterns of figurative language involves annotating and then listing all the figures of speech you find in the reading—metaphor, simile, and symbol; grouping the figures of speech that appear to express similar feelings and attitudes, and labeling each group; and writing to explore the meaning of the patterns you have found.

The following inventory and analysis of the King excerpt (pp. 417–421) demonstrates the process of exploring the significance of figurative language.

Listing Figures of Speech

Step 1 produced the following inventory:

order is a dangerously structured dam that blocks the flow
 social progress should flow
 stumbling block in the stride toward freedom
 injustice is like a boil that can never be cured
 the light of human conscience and air of national opinion
 time is something to be used, neutral, an ally, ripe
 quicksand of racial injustice
 the solid rock of human dignity
 human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability
 men are co-workers with God
 groups springing up

promised land of racial justice
 vital urge engulfed
 pent-up resentments
 normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative
 outlet of nonviolent direct action
 root out injustice
 powerful action is an antidote
 disease of segregation

Grouping Figures of Speech

Step 2 yielded three groups:

Sickness: segregation is a disease; action is healthy, the only antidote; injustice is like a boil
Underground: tension is hidden; resentments are pent-up, repressed; injustice must be rooted out; extremist groups are springing up; discontent can be channeled into a creative outlet
Blockage: forward movement is impeded by obstacles—the dam, stumbling block; human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; social progress should flow

Exploring Patterns

Step 3 entailed about ten minutes of writing to explore the meaning of the groups listed in step 2:

The patterns of blockage and underground suggest a feeling of frustration. Inertia is a problem; movement forward toward progress or upward toward the promised land is stalled. There seems to be a strong need to break through the resistance, the passivity, the discontent and to be creative, active, vital. These are probably King's feelings both about his attempt to lead purposeful, effective demonstrations and his effort to write a convincing letter.

The simile of injustice being like a boil links the two patterns of underground and sickness, suggesting something bad, a disease, is inside the people or the society. The cure is to expose, to root out, the blocked hatred and injustice and release the tension or emotion that has so long been repressed. This implies that repression itself is the evil, not simply what is repressed.

CHECKLIST

Exploring the Significance of Figurative Language

To understand how figurative language—metaphor, simile, and symbol—contributes to the reading's meaning.

1. Annotate and then list all the figures of speech you find.
2. Group them and label each group.
3. Write to explore the meaning of the patterns you have found.

LOOKING FOR PATTERNS OF OPPOSITION

All texts contain voices of opposition. These voices may echo the views and values of critical readers the writer anticipates or predecessors to which the writer is responding; they may even reflect the writer's own conflicting values. You may need to look closely for such a dialogue of opposing voices within the text.

When we think of oppositions, we ordinarily think of polarities such as *yes* and *no*, *up* and *down*, *black* and *white*, *new* and *old*. Some oppositions, however, may be more subtle. The excerpt from "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (pp. 417–421) is rich in such oppositions: *moderate* versus *extremist*, *order* versus *justice*, *direct action* versus *passive acceptance*, *expression* versus *repression*. These oppositions are not accidental; and they form a significant pattern that gives a critical reader important information about the essay.

A careful reading will show that one of the two terms in an opposition is nearly always valued over the other. In the King passage, for example, *extremist* is valued over *moderate* (paragraph 9). This preference for extremism is surprising. The critical reader should ask why: when white extremists like the Ku Klux Klan have committed so many outrages against black southerners, King would prefer extremism. If King is trying to convince his readers to accept his point of view, why would he represent himself as an extremist? Moreover, why would a clergyman advocate extremism instead of moderation?

By studying the pattern of oppositions you can answer these questions more fully. You will see that King sets up this opposition to force his readers to examine their own values and realize that they are in fact misplaced. Instead of working toward justice, he says, those who support law and order maintain the unjust status quo. Getting his readers to think of the white moderate as blocking rather than facilitating peaceful change brings them to align themselves with King and perhaps even embrace his strategy of nonviolent resistance.

Looking for patterns of oppositions is a four-step method of analysis:

1. Divide a piece of paper in half lengthwise by drawing a line down the middle. In the left-hand column, list those words and phrases from the

In this reading, King addresses as "white moderates" the clergy-men who criticized him. He sees the moderate position in essentially negative terms, whereas extremism can be either negative or positive. Moderation is equated with passivity, acceptance of the status quo, fear of disorder, perhaps even fear of any change. The moderates believe justice can wait, whereas law and order cannot. Yet, as King points out, there is no law and order for blacks who are victimized and denied their constitutional rights.

The argument King has with the white moderates is basically over means and ends. Both agree on the ends but disagree on the means that should be taken to secure those ends. What means are justified to achieve one's goals? How does one decide? King is willing to risk a certain amount of tension and disorder to bring about justice; he suggests that if progress is not made, more disorder, not less, is bound to result. In a sense, King represents himself as a moderate caught between the two extremes—the white moderates' "do-nothingism" and the black extremists' radicalism.

At the same time, King substitutes the opposition between moderation and extremism with an opposition between two kinds of extremism, one for love and the other for hate. In fact, he represents himself as an extremist willing to make whatever sacrifices—and perhaps even to take whatever means—are necessary to reach his goal of justice.

Considering Alternative Points of View

Step 4 entailed a few minutes of writing exploring the point of view opposed to the author's and several more minutes of writing presenting King's possible response to this point of view:

The moderates' side: I can sympathize with the moderates' fear of further disorder and violence. Even though King advocates nonviolence, violence does result. He may not cause it, but it does occur because of him. Moderates do not really advocate passive acceptance of injustice, but want to pursue justice through legal means. These methods may be slow, but since ours is a system of law, the only way to make change is through that system. King wants to shake up the system, to force it to move quickly for fear of violence. That strikes me as blackmail, as bad as if he were committing violence himself. Couldn't public opinion be brought to bear on the legal system to move more quickly? Can't we elect officials who will change unjust laws and see that the just ones are obeyed? The vote should be the weapon in a democracy, shouldn't it?

King's possible response: He would probably argue that this viewpoint is naive. One of the major injustices at that time was that blacks were prevented from voting, and no elected official would risk going against those who voted for him or her. King

text that you annotated because they seem to indicate oppositions. Enter in the right-hand column the word or phrase that is the opposite of each word or phrase in the left-hand column. You may have to paraphrase or even supply this opposite word or phrase if it is not stated directly in the text.

- For each pair of words or phrases, put an asterisk next to the one that seems to be preferred by the writer.
- Study the list of preferred words or phrases, and identify what you think is the predominant system of values put forth by the text. Do the same for the other list, identifying the alternative system or systems of values implied in the text. Take about ten minutes to describe the oppositions in writing.
- To explore these conflicting points of view, write a few sentences presenting one side, and then write a few more sentences presenting the other side. Use as many of the words or phrases from the list as you can—explaining, extending, and justifying the values they imply. You may also, if you wish, quarrel with the choice of words or phrases on the grounds that they are slanted or oversimplify the issue.

The following inventory and analysis of the King excerpt demonstrates the method for analyzing oppositions in a text.

Listing Oppositions

This list of oppositions with asterisks next to King's preferred word or phrase in each pair demonstrates steps 1 and 2:

white moderate	*extremist
order	*justice
negative peace	*positive peace
absence of justice	*presence of justice
goals	*methods
*direct action	passive acceptance
*exposed tension	hidden tension
*robbed	robber
*individual	society
*words	silence
*expression	repression
*extension of justice	preservation of injustice
*extremist for love, truth, and justice	extremist for immorality

Analyzing Oppositions

Step 3 produced the following description of the conflicting points of view:

would probably agree that public opinion needs to be changed, that people need to be educated, but he would also argue that education is not enough when people are being systematically deprived of their legal rights. The very system of law that should protect people was being used as a weapon against blacks in the South. The only way to get something done is to shake people up, make them aware of the injustice they are allowing to continue. Seeing their own police officers committing violence should make people question their own values and begin to take action to right the wrongs.

CHECKLIST

Looking for Patterns of Opposition

- To look for and analyze the patterns of opposition in a reading,
1. Annotate the selection for oppositions, and list the pairs on a separate page.
 2. Put an asterisk next to the word in each pair that is preferred in the selection.
 3. Examine the pattern of preferred terms to discover the system of values the pattern implies, and do the same for the unpreferred terms.
 4. Write to analyze and evaluate these alternative systems of value.

EVALUATING THE LOGIC OF AN ARGUMENT

An argument has two essential parts: a claim and support. The *claim* asserts a conclusion—an idea, an opinion, a judgment, or a point of view—that the writer wants readers to accept. The *support* includes *reasons* (shared beliefs, assumptions, and values) and *evidence* (facts, examples, statistics, and authorities) that give readers the basis for accepting the conclusion.

When you assess the logic of an argument, you are concerned about the process of reasoning as well as the argument's truthfulness. Three conditions must be met for an argument to be considered logically acceptable—what we call the ABC test:

- A. The support must be *appropriate* to the claim.
- B. All of the statements must be *believable*.
- C. The argument must be *consistent* and complete.

A. Testing for Appropriateness

If readers believe a writer's reasoning to be appropriate, they see that all of the evidence is relevant to the claim it supports. For example, if a writer claims that children must be allowed certain legal rights, readers could readily accept as

appropriate support quotations from Supreme Court justices' decisions but might question quotations from a writer of popular children's books. Readers could probably accept a writer's reasoning that if women have certain legal rights then so should children but would almost certainly reject comparing children's needs for legal protection to the need for drivers to observe traffic laws.

As these examples illustrate, appropriateness of support comes most often into question when the writer is invoking authority or arguing by analogy. For example, in paragraph 3 of the excerpt, King argues by analogy and, at the same time, invokes authority: "Isn't this like condemning Socrates because his unswerving commitment to truth and his philosophical inquiries precipitated the act by the misguided populace in which they made him drink hemlock?" Read-ers not only must judge the appropriateness of comparing the Greek populace's condemnation of Socrates to the white moderates' condemnation of King's action, but also must judge whether it is appropriate to accept Socrates as an authority on this subject. Because Socrates is generally respected for his teaching on justice, his words and actions are likely to be considered appropriate to King's situation in Birmingham.

In paragraph 2, King argues that if law and order fail to establish justice, "they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress." The analogy asserts the following logical relationship: Law and order is to progress toward justice what a dam is to water. If readers do not accept this analogy, then the argument fails the test of appropriateness. Arguing by analogy is usually considered a weak kind of argument because most analogies are only partially parallel.

There are several common flaws or fallacies in reasoning that cause an argument to fail the test of appropriateness:

- *False analogy* occurs when two cases are not sufficiently parallel to lead readers to accept the claim.
- *False use of authority* occurs when writers invoke as expert in the field being discussed a person whose expertise or authority lies not in the given field but in another.
- *Non sequitur* (Latin, meaning "it does not follow") occurs when one statement is not logically connected to another.
- *Red herring* occurs when a writer raises an irrelevant issue to draw attention away from the central issue.
- *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (Latin, meaning "after this, therefore because of this") occurs when the writer implies that because one event follows another, the first caused the second. Chronology is not the same as causality.

B. Testing for Believability

Believability is a measure of the degree to which readers are willing to accept the assertions supporting the claim. Whereas some assertions are obviously true, the most depend on the readers' sharing certain values, beliefs, and assumptions with the writer. Readers who agree with the white moderate that maintaining

law and order is more important than establishing justice are not going to accept King's claim that the white moderate is blocking progress.

Other statements such as those asserting facts, statistics, examples, and authorities present evidence to support a claim. Readers must put all of these kinds of evidence to the test of believability.

Facts are statements that can be proven objectively to be true. The believability of facts depends on their *accuracy* (they should not distort or misrepresent reality), *completeness* (they should not omit important details), and the *trustworthiness* of their sources (sources should be qualified and unbiased). In the excerpt from "Letter from Birmingham Jail," for instance, King asserts as fact that the African American will not wait much longer for racial justice (paragraph 8). His critics might question the factuality of this assertion by asking: Is it true of all African Americans? How much longer will they wait? How does King know what the African American will and will not do?

Statistics are often assumed to be factual, but they are really only interpretations of numerical data. The believability of statistics depends on the *comparability* of the data (are apples being compared to oranges?), the *accuracy* of the methods of gathering and analyzing data (representative samples should be used and variables accounted for), and the *trustworthiness* of the sources (sources should be qualified and unbiased).

Examples and anecdotes are particular instances that if accepted as believable lead readers to accept the general claim. The believability of examples depends on their *representativeness* (whether they are truly typical and thus generalizable) and their *specificity* (whether particular details make them seem true to life). Even if a vivid example or gripping anecdote does not convince readers, it strengthens argumentative writing by clarifying the meaning the bringing home the point dramatically. In paragraph 5, for example, King supports his generalization that there are black nationalist extremists motivated by bitterness and hatred by citing the specific example of Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement. Conversely, in paragraph 9, he refers to Jesus, Paul, Luther, and others as examples of extremists motivated by love. These examples support his assertion that extremism is not in itself wrong, that any judgment must depend on the cause for which one is an extremist.

Authorities are people to whom the writer attributes expertise on a given subject. Such authorities not only must be appropriate, as mentioned earlier, but must be believable. The believability of authorities depends on their *credibility*, on whether the reader accepts them as experts on the topic. King cites authorities repeatedly throughout the essay; for instance, he refers not only to religious leaders like Jesus and Luther but also to American political leaders like Lincoln and Jefferson. These figures are certain to have a high degree of credibility among King's readers.

In addition, you should be aware of the following fallacies in reasoning that undermine the believability of an argument:

- *Begging the question* occurs when the believability of the support itself depends on the believability of the claim. Another name for this kind of fallacy is *circular reasoning*.

- *Failing to accept the burden of proof* occurs when the writer asserts a claim but provides no support for it.
- *Hasty generalization* occurs when the writer asserts a claim on the basis of an isolated example.
- *Sweeping generalization* occurs when the writer fails to qualify the applicability of the claim and asserts that it applies to "all" instances instead of to "some" instances.
- *Overgeneralization* occurs when the writer fails to qualify the claim and asserts that it is "certainly true" rather than that it "may be true."

C. Testing for Consistency and Completeness

Be sure that all the support works together, that none of the supporting statements contradicts any of the other statements, and that no important objection or opposing argument is unacknowledged. To test for consistency and completeness, ask: Are any of the supporting statements contradictory? Are there any objections or opposing arguments that are not refuted?

A critical reader might regard as contradictory King's characterizing himself first as a moderate between the forces of complacency and violence, and later as an extremist opposed to the forces of violence. King attempts to reconcile this apparent contradiction by explicitly redefining extremism in paragraph 9.

Similarly, the fact that King fails to examine and refute every legal recourse available to his cause might allow a critical reader to question the sufficiency of his supporting arguments.

In evaluating the consistency of an argument, you should also be aware of the following fallacies:

- *Slippery slope* occurs when the writer argues that taking one step will lead inevitably to a next step, one that is undesirable.
- *Equivocation* occurs when a writer uses the same term in two different senses in an argument.
- *Oversimplification* occurs when an argument obscures or denies the complexity of the issue.
- *Either/or reasoning* occurs when the writer reduces the issue to only two alternatives that are polar opposites.
- *Double standard* occurs when two or more comparable things are judged according to different standards; it often involves holding the opposing argument to a higher standard than the one to which the writer holds his or her own argument.

Following is one student's written evaluation of the logic of King's argument in the excerpt. The student wrote these paragraphs after applying the ABC test evaluating the appropriateness, believability, consistency and completeness King's supporting reasons and evidence.