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LIBS 6810: Information Literacy  
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## **Self-assessment Report: Academic Literacy**

### ***Instructional Goals and Objectives***

The goal of this instructional presentation was to demonstrate the need for, and the methods of, performing an academic reading of a source. The objectives which would allow this goal to be achieved were fairly simple. First, I would discuss the difference between a casual and an academic reading. In an academic setting, an explanation of the absolute necessity for the careful and skilled reading of sources should be enough to establish motivation and interest for any students with a lack in these areas. This interest is, of course, not strictly measurable but would be a factor in classroom involvement and interest, as well as in questions asked at the end of the session.

The second objective was to perform an academic reading in class, using a short section from a semi-academic text. The text contains a complete argument, as well as some specialized terminology, and I had hoped that the class would be able to extract the argument from it. The accuracy of this reading could be compared against a sample outline which I included in the handout for the class.

The last objective, which would only be accomplished by the two student evaluators, was to perform an academic reading of a longer section from the same book. Again, the accuracy of this particular summary could be judged against one I had prepared before. Given a real classroom setting, the summaries completed for this assignment would have been discussed in

class the next week, and would have formed the basis for a class on evaluating arguments.

### ***Principles and Theoretical Basis***

I kept several general principles from class readings in mind while preparing the materials for this class. To begin, Dervin's theories on sense-making required that I present academic literacy in relation to literacy skills already possessed by the class, and that the students feel that they are building on skills they already possess, rather than developing an entirely new skill. Our discussions – and Dalrymple's (2002) article – on learning styles gave me something to think about, though I remain unsure about how important these considerations really are. I used PowerPoint slides, lecture, and participatory discussion, as well as encouraging students to mark their classroom reading. This combination of methodologies should have addressed a variety of basic learning styles.

Olson's (2000) article was clearly related to my topic, though I did not address any of his main requirements of critical thinking other than "disposition" (310). The following class would have dealt with the more evaluative aspects of critical thinking, which would have addressed more of Olson's requirements. I mentioned, during the introductory portion of the lecture, two studies which discussed the epistemological development, or as Olson would have it, the "disposition" of undergraduate students. These were Whitmire (2004), and Weiler (2005). From these two articles, I learned that undergraduate students may, first of all, be too credulous, and may, secondly, not be inclined to value or argue for their own opinions either in class or in their papers. I took therefore took the time to explain both the importance and the expectation of academic argument. I have some doubts about the effectiveness of this sort of encouragement against the types of psychological pressure discussed in these two articles, but it would at least be a beginning. Certainly, as Olson asserts, this attitude is an important one

and I would have to hope that classroom discussion and encouragement could be of some help in helping students to develop epistemologically, and that this development need not be simply a matter of time and maturation.

### ***Self-Assessment***

There was only one major problem with this instructional presentation (in my opinion): The reading used in class was too long and complicated. It would have been better to use a much shorter reading, even if it was only two or three sentences, which presented a shorter and clearer argument. I chose the reading I used on the basis that it provided a complete argument which might be of interest in a classroom setting, but I overestimated my own ability to lead the class to the main points contained in the article. The list we compiled on the board was simply too long, and by the time we had completed the article I had no time left to address the process of deciding which of the points suggested by my classmates were really major points, and which were supporting points. In this sense, the in-class exercise was a failure, as we did not produce a meaningful summary at all. If the in-class reading had been shorter it would have been less interesting, but would have allowed me to discuss prioritizing the list of hypotheses, premises, and conclusions that the exercise was meant to produce.

Even with this less-than-optimal performance, however, the evaluation results were quite good. Both Danielle and Jen produced quite workable summaries of the after-class exercise reading, and in two very different formats, so the methodology obviously works. It could simply have been better managed in class. Generally speaking, the evaluation responses were very positive, with the only exception expressing doubt about the efficacy of the in-class summary, to which I can completely relate.

The evaluations were positive, but switching the positive and negative evaluations between questions 1, 2, 3, and 5 did not prove as effective an aid to attention as I had hoped. This may have been because there were

three nearly identical tables in a row, so that my evaluators did not read the headings carefully, as the form on the second page (after some prose responses) was read and filled out correctly. On my next such evaluation form, I will be careful to intersperse free-form answers and check-boxes, rather than having several of the same type of response in a row.

I think that the actual instructional portion of the class went quite well. I still retain a few verbal tics which I will have to work on. Mostly, I tend to think out loud, and sometimes irrelevantly or in self-observation, while speaking in public. Usually, this has a comedic and relaxed effect, which is not all bad, but it is still a bad habit as it is done without intent. As mentioned, it would also have been helpful to have a few more minutes to evaluate the summary, but there is nothing I would choose to leave out of the lecture portion.

### ***Appendices***

I have included all classroom handouts and materials, with the exception of the PowerPoint slides, so that these would all be available in one package. Appendix A is the in-class reading exercise. Appendix B is the reading exercise assigned to my two evaluators. Appendix C is the classroom handout, and Appendix D the evaluation form. Appendix E is a list of works cited, mainly in this self-assessment report (Weiler and Whitmire's studies were mentioned in the lecture, though not by name). Finally, appendix F (hand-written in the top-right corner of the pages of this section) contains the materials returned to me by my two evaluators.

## Academic Literacy: In-Class Reading

It is widely believed that illegal drugs are responsible for much of the violence in U.S. cities. This raises an interesting question: does stricter enforcement of drug laws increase or decrease violence?

Increased enforcement raises the street price of drugs. If users commit crimes to pay for drugs, and if the demand for drugs is inelastic, as the usual portrayal of addicts suggests, the result should be increased expenditure on drugs funded by increased amounts of drug related crime. Whether or not demand is inelastic at current prices, it seems clear that complete legalization of drugs would greatly decrease such crime. Almost all of the current price of illegal drugs is due to the fact that they are illegal. A heroin addict who kept his expenditure on heroin constant while prices fell twenty or thirty fold would not last long.

A second explanation for violence is that it is a form of rent seeking. On this account, criminal firms have local monopolies which they must defend against the competition of rival firms. The greater the monopoly profit, the more will be spent trying to capture or defend turf. Increased enforcement effort increases the cost of doing business, decreasing monopoly profit, so increased enforcement should result in less violence.

A third possibility is that violence is simply a consequence of insecure property rights. Drug sellers have lots of portable wealth in the form of money and drugs, and do not have the option of calling the police if someone steals it. The result is violence by drug dealers defending their property and by other people trying to steal it. That fits the account in *The Cocaine Kids*, written by a sociologist with contacts in that market. A similar pattern appears in descriptions of the prohibition era, with bootleggers hijacking trucks full of booze belonging to their competitors.

The amount of such violence should be roughly proportional to the amount of wealth to be stolen or defended, which depends on the total value of drugs sold. If demand is inelastic, the increased price due to increased enforcement effort will produce a less than proportional decrease in quantity demanded, so total revenue will rise, resulting in increased violence. If demand is elastic, increased enforcement should lead to less revenue and less violence.

We have three different explanations for drug related violence. One implies that marginal increases in enforcement will decrease violence, two that they will increase violence if demand is inelastic, decrease it if demand is elastic. All imply that legalizing drugs would eliminate drug related crime.

Friedman, D. (1996). Rational criminals and intentional accidents: The economics of law and law-breaking. In *Hidden Order: The Economics of Everyday Life*. New York: Harper-Collins. Retrieved October 19, 2005 from [http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Academic/Hidden\\_Order/Hidden\\_Order\\_Chapter\\_20.html](http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Academic/Hidden_Order/Hidden_Order_Chapter_20.html)

## Academic Literacy: Skill-testing Reading Exercise

Many years ago, I was living in a part of Manhattan near Columbia University. When I found it necessary to go out at night, I carried with me a four-foot walking stick. My friend Ernest Van den Haag argued that I was making a dangerous mistake; potential muggers would see my behavior as a challenge and swarm all over me. I responded that muggers, like other rational businessmen, would prefer to obtain their income at the lowest possible cost. By carrying a stick, I was not only raising the cost I could inflict on them if I chose to resist, I was also announcing my intention of resisting. They would rationally choose easier prey.

I never did get mugged, which is some evidence for my view. More comes from observing who does get mugged. If muggers are out to prove their machismo, they ought to pick on football players; there is not much glory in mugging little old ladies. If muggers are rational businessmen seeking revenue at the lowest possible cost, on the other hand, mugging little old ladies makes a lot of sense. Little old ladies--and other relatively defenseless people--get mugged. Football players do not. It is said that someone once asked Willie Sutton why he robbed banks. "That's where the money is" was his reply.

The economic approach to crime starts from one simple assumption: criminals are rational. A burglar burgles for the same reason I teach economics--because he finds it a more attractive profession than any other. The obvious conclusion is that the way to reduce burglary--whether as a legislator or a homeowner--is by raising the costs of the burglar's profession or reducing its benefits.

The analysis that helped me decide what to take with me on my evening strolls around Manhattan's Upper West Side can also be applied to a point that comes up in arguments over gun control. Opponents argue that gun control, by disarming potential victims, makes it more difficult for them to protect themselves. Supporters reply that since criminals are more experienced in violence than victims, the odds in any armed confrontation are with the criminal. This is probably true, but it is almost entirely irrelevant to the argument.

Suppose one little old lady in ten carries a gun. Suppose that one in ten of those, if attacked by a mugger, succeeds in killing the mugger instead of being killed by him--or shooting herself in the foot. On average, the mugger is much more likely to win the encounter than the little old lady. But--also on average--every hundred muggings produce one dead mugger. At those odds, mugging is an unprofitable business--not many little old ladies carry enough money to justify one chance in a hundred of being killed getting it. The number of muggers declines drastically, not because they have all been killed but because they have, rationally, sought safer professions.

When, as children, we learn about different sorts of animals, we imagine them in a strict hierarchy, with the stronger and more ferocious preying on everything below them. That is not how it works. A lion could, no doubt, be fairly confident of defeating a leopard, or a wolf of killing a fox. But a lion that made a habit of preying on leopards would not survive very long; a small chance of being killed and a substantial risk of being injured is too high a price for one dinner. That is why lions hunt zebras instead.

In analyzing conflict, whether between two animals, criminal and victim, competing firms, or warring nations, our natural tendency is to imagine an all-out battle in which all that matters is victory or defeat. That is rarely if ever the case. In the conflict between the

mugger and the little old lady, the mugger, on average, wins. But the cost of the conflict--one chance in a hundred of being killed--is high enough so that the mugger prefers to avoid it. In this case as in many others, the problem faced by the potential victim is not how to defeat the aggressor but only how to make aggression unprofitable.

Our discussion of punishment costs raises an interesting puzzle: why does our legal system make so much use of imprisonment, when more efficient punishments are available? Suppose a convicted criminal is indifferent between a certainty of ten years in jail and one chance in six of execution. Instead of giving him a ten year sentence, we roll a die: 1-5 we turn him loose, 6 we hang him. The criminal is, on average, no worse off than before, deterrence is unaffected, and we save a lot of money on prisons. We can save still more by throwing away the die, cutting the police budget, catching a sixth as many offenders as before, and hanging all of them.

Execution is more efficient than imprisonment, but a fine is better still. Why not have a system of punishment designed to squeeze as much money out of convicted criminals as possible, then provide any additional punishment in less efficient ways? We could, for example, offer criminals the option of buying shorter sentences or lower probabilities of execution. And if we are going to imprison people, why not get something out of them by using them as some form of slave labor? If we must execute criminals, why not let their bodies forfeit to the state to help ease the shortage of organs for organ transplants? If one has no scruples about how criminals are treated, there are quite a lot of ways of decreasing the net cost of punishment.

The problem with an efficient punishment is that somebody collects it. Suppose we had a legal system which did a very good job of squeezing money out of convicted criminals, say by auctioning them off as slaves for a price of a few hundred thousand dollars each--not an unreasonable price for a slave in a modern society. It would then be in the interest of whomever was running the law enforcement system to convict lots of people--whether or not they were guilty. The result would be a society where large amounts were spent by people either trying to appropriate other people's human capital by convicting them of something or trying to keep their own human capital from being appropriated--rent seeking with large stakes and large costs.

This is not a wholly imaginary problem. One way of looking at current problems with punitive damages, product design liability, class actions, fraud on the market claims, and the like, is as just such a rent seeking struggle. Plaintiffs sue not to improve products but to transfer money from producers to themselves, and producers defend themselves by not producing products that some jury somewhere might think were defective--with the result that the U.S. no longer produces small airplanes and has a hard time finding a firm willing to manufacture vaccines. Similar problems arise with civil forfeiture, under which police departments can seize property on the claim that it has been used in connection with illegal activities--not necessarily by the owner. There have been allegations of serious corruption in connection with civil forfeiture, including one case in which law enforcement officials apparently killed a landowner while trespassing on his property looking for marijuana plants--after first checking on the (multi-million dollar) value of the land. The economic analysis of crime must take into account the rational self-interested behavior of everyone involved--including the police.

Friedman, D. (1996). Rational criminals and intentional accidents: The economics of law and law-breaking. In *Hidden Order: The Economics of Everyday Life*. New York: Harper-Collins. Retrieved October 19, 2005 from [http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Academic/Hidden\\_Order/Hidden\\_Order\\_Chapter\\_20.html](http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Academic/Hidden_Order/Hidden_Order_Chapter_20.html)

## **Academic Literacy: Stage 1 – Summary Guide**

During your university degree, you will have to read a large amount of material, understand that material, and decide how to integrate it with your own opinions. One of the skills that will make this possible is summarizing. As we discussed in class, reading is both active and interactive. This guide has the main content from today's lecture, and should help if you forget some of the details of creating a summary.

Remember, though, that the only way summarizing will work is for you to read critically. Reading with a pen in hand is great, but reading with your brain engaged is the real challenge.

### **Stages of Reading**

#### 1) Quick Reading

- a) For an article or book chapter: Read quickly through the abstract, the introduction and the conclusion. Skim the article, looking for headings, charts, and other bits that stand out. Try to get an idea what the author is trying to say.
- b) For a book: Read the preface and the table of contents. Skim through the book, reading the chapter introductions and conclusions more carefully than the rest. Spend more time on chapters that look (from the table of contents) like they might be particularly applicable.

#### 2) Analytical Reading

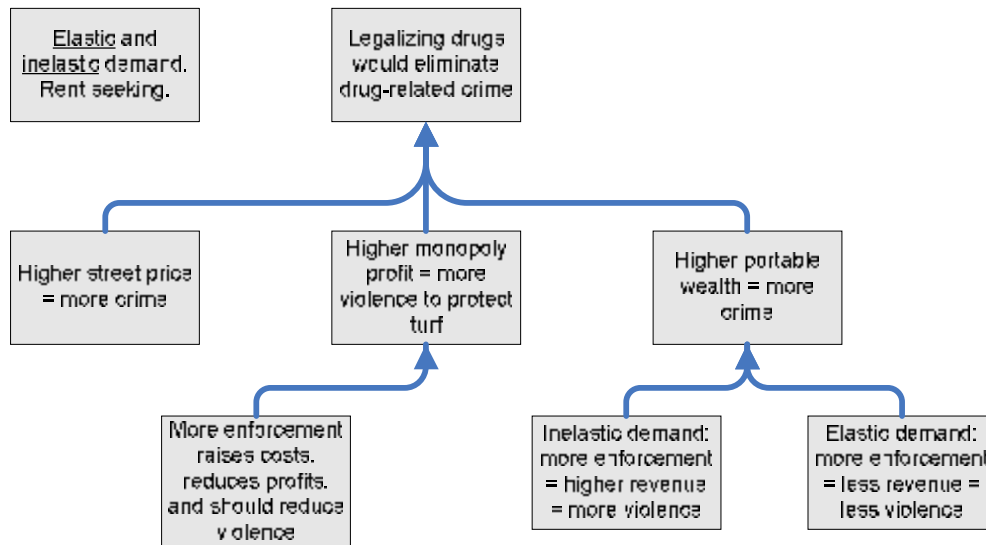
- a) With a pen in hand (and your brain engaged), read the content carefully. Mark main points and supporting points, so that you can pull them out later on. Remember that these points may not be in order, and that there may be quite a bit that does not specifically relate to the main argument of the article (or book).
  - i. Do not mark too much. You are looking for the essentials. On the other hand, don't miss something that might be important because you're not sure.
  - ii. Remember to note words that seem to be important to the author. They may be defined in some special way, or they may just get used frequently.
  - iii. This may take (for now) several readings of the article, as you decide what the main argument is and which points are really used to support that argument. It will get faster and more reliable with practice.
- b) Pull out the main point and the supporting points that you have marked, and build a summary of the content. Remember that you are allowed (encouraged, even) to restate or re-order these points in any way you find helpful, as long as you are careful to reflect the content of the article.

- i. Remember that you are not evaluating or judging yet. You are trying to get an accurate idea of the content so that your evaluation and judgment are meaningful.
- ii. Use whatever type of summary (paragraph, text list, flowchart, or whatever) that works best for you. You may have to try several different methods until you find one that really helps you see the argument clearly.

### 3) Evaluation and Judgment (Next Week)

#### Summary example (from the in-class reading)

- 1) Legalizing drugs would eliminate drug-related crime
  - a. Higher street price = more crime
  - b. Higher monopoly profit = more violence to protect turf
    - i. More enforcement raises costs, reduces profits, and should reduce violence
  - c. Higher portable wealth = more crime
    - i. Inelastic demand: more enforcement = higher revenue = more violence
    - ii. Elastic demand: more enforcement = less revenue = less violence
- 2) Special terms: elastic and inelastic demand, rent seeking.



## Academic Literacy: Evaluation Form

### 1) The Presentation: Please mark one box for each criterion.

Evaluation Criteria	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This was a topic that I found helpful				
The instructor was easy to understand				
The PowerPoint slides were useful				
The in-class exercise was clear and well explained				
After the exercise, I felt that I understood how to summarize				
I think that I will use this skill in other classes				

### 2) The Summary Guide: Please mark one box for each criterion.

Evaluation Criteria	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The guide was clear and easy to understand				
The guide did a good job of explaining how to summarize				
I will use this guide when working on other courses				

### 3) The In-class exercise: Please mark one box for each criterion.

Evaluation Criteria	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I found doing a quick pre-read helpful				
I was able to recognize the main point of the article.				
I was able to recognize sub-points as we read them.				
I marked the page while doing the in-class reading.				
The summary we made explained the main argument of the article				
It will be easier to decide whether I agree with the argument in the article after doing this summary				

**4) Please answer the following questions.**

a) Did you think that the tutorial would have been a help to a first-year undergraduate?

b) What could the instructor have done better (or differently) with the instructional session that would have made it a more helpful experience for you (as a first-year undergraduate)?

c) Any other comments?

**5) The Skill-testing Exercise: Please mark one box for each criterion.**

<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
I was able to summarize the content of the article				
My summary explains the main argument of the article				
This assignment was similar to the in-class exercise				
I found reading this way different from my regular reading style				

a) Did you think that this skill-testing exercise was an appropriate adjunct to the classroom session?

b) Would something else have been better?

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