**How to Read Philosophy**

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| **Stage 1: Stage Setting**  **Pre-read**  **Aim**: To develop an understanding of the structure and purpose of the text.  For a very short time, examine the general features of the article. Look at the title and section headings. Skim the first and last paragraphs to see if you can establish the focus of the text. | | |
| **Speed-read**  **Aim**: To develop a basic understanding of the text   * Identify the thesis statement or statements (What is it that philosophers are trying to show?) * Look up definitions of words you don’t know and write them in the margins. Remember that some words may have a special meaning in philosophy. If the dictionary definition doesn’t make sense try searching for the word in a philosophical encyclopedia. * FLAG the structure | **Flagging**  Foc.  Thes.  Dfn. Dst. E.g.  Dis.  Rsn. Arg. Obj  Rep.  Rej.  Con.  Sum.  ??? | General topic this article follows (I will discuss X, Y and Z)  Specific claim the philosopher is trying to establish (I will show that…)  A definition  A distinction  An example  A discussion or explanation of an argument  A reason for supporting an assertion or conclusion  An argument  An objection to an argument or reason  A reply to an objection  A rejoinder to a reply  A conclusion of an argument  A summary of the argument  What? I don’t get this! I must re-read this section carefully. |
| **Stage 2: Understanding**  **Aim**: To develop a sophisticated understanding of the text   * Re-read the entire article VERY CAREFULLY * Correct and add to your previous flagging * Take lots of notes. In these note rephrase what the author says in your own words * Summarise the article in enough detail that you will not need to re-read the article again to remind yourself of the arguments it contains. | | |
| **Stage 3: Evaluating**  **Aim**: To develop your own views about what you have read   * Fix any mistaken flagging * Write down anything new that you discover as you go through the text again | **Key Questions**   * Are the conclusions well defended? * Are the arguments for the conclusion persuasive? Why or why not? * Are there any counter-examples to any assertion made by the author? * Are any of my own beliefs that can’t be true if the author is right? * Are there any points the author didn’t consider that might influence what I think is true? | |