

Glover Reading Rubric for Nonfiction

1) Start by simply looking at the physical text, see how long it is (the better to compare it to your own essays and memoirs in terms of pacing, event/length ratio, etc.), see if it is divided into sections and how that division is accomplished technically (simple line breaks, numbers, chapter heads, etc). Is it a relatively continuous text, fragmented, or spliced (two or more threads alternating)? How are the linebreaks used, ie what sorts of changes does the author bring about at the linebreak or section break.

2) Name the type of text: memoir, essay, personal essay, trauma memoir, literary essay, reportage, etc. (Each will have its own subroutine of protocols.) Is it primarily narrative, descriptive, or analytical? Does it have a moral or does it try to prove a point? Is humorous? Notice these varied nonfiction angles of attack.

3) Analyze the point of view structure. What it is and who it is. Analyze, especially in memoir or retrospective personal essays, the present time narrative/reflective stance and the earlier narrative/reflective stance. List other characters and their relationship with the point of view. How are their states of mind introduced into the text?

4) Summarize the text. Who does what to whom and what happens after. Or what topic is discussed and how does it develop?

5) Keep careful track of words, ideas, images, grammatical structures that repeat (but do not try to draw any conclusions about why they repeat yet). Track, note and number the instances of important repeated elements. Decide if there is a primary image pattern and if there are also subsidiary patterns.

6) Time flow: Only at this step should you begin to even THINK about the larger conceptual/structural (but not thematic) issues. Here you should begin by seeing how the sequence in which events are told relates to the basic chronology of events. When and where is the scene-of-the-writing (the writer, the present narrator)? What is forward-moving narrative action, what is background, and how is the background placed in the text (one large section, a dance of little sections, maybe very little, possibly alternating sections)? How much or little does the author "play" with the time flow? If this is a reminiscent narrator, how does the time of the telling of the story interpenetrate the story itself? Mark and be aware of time control devices.

7) Outline the basic steps, either events or topic/argument development. Do not move to speculating on what the author means by writing such and such. Stop yourself at simply stating what the author says (use quotations). Look at scene/event length, how dialogue is played on the page. If two stories are juxtaposed (a common essay structure), outline both and show the places where they are interspliced together.

8) Mark passages of reflection and commentary. Mark the major thematic passages. Use the words from these passages to identify the theme of the text. Do not interpret, just quote the text as written.

9) Make comparisons. After you name the type of text, recall other texts that are similar to this in one way or another. In your mind, compare and contrast how different authors handle similar sorts of structures, actions, genres.

–Douglas Glover