Introduction

What is Mindful Reading?

Before we get to **mindful reading**, let's answer what at first might seem like the simpler question: What is reading? Reading is something we all do every day—we read books, street signs, text messages, blogs, product labels, billboards—but have you ever stopped to think about what happens when we read? How does your brain process the marks your eyes see? How are these marks understood as letters, words, and sentences that have meaning? Research has shown that when we read, different regions and systems in the brain play different roles. Neuroscientists at Princeton University, Tanja Kassuba and Sabine Kastner, explain that the visual system and language regions of the brain work together to translate the marks we see on a page into words we can understand. Did you know that our eyes hardly move as they do all of this work? We might think that as we read our eyes move smoothly along the words as we read them, but, instead, our eyes remain largely motionless since eyes can only see when they are in this state. Between these motionless periods, our eyes move very rapidly, jumping along the lines, again with little reference to the words before us (Rayner).

Cognitive psychologists, who research the brain, have conducted various experiments to study the power of reading. For example, in his book *Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction*, Keith Oatley argues that reading fiction (stories) provides such a vivid simulation of real life that the brain processes a detailed description of an experience one may find in a novel in the same way it would process the actual experience. Equally interesting is that Raymond A. Mar and his colleagues, including Oatley, conducted experiments that ultimately showed that people who read fiction are more empathetic than those who do not. Mar and his colleagues argue that this is the case because fiction offers the unique opportunity to identify with characters, something that fiction readers take with them beyond the text and into real life situations.

As these brain studies suggest, reading can be an escape into another world that often seems as real as the one around you. But not all reading is peppered with colorful characters and exciting scenes. While you may end up reading some fiction in your English classes, you will likely read a lot of textbooks in college, too. Of course, this kind of reading is not intended to send you into another world, but meant to inform you or teach you something in a more straightforward manner. Fiction and textbooks won't be the only reading you'll do in college. You may also be asked to read difficult peer-reviewed articles, dense scientific reports, business memoranda, and editorials, among other

kinds of texts. You will, therefore, need to figure out how to move among all of the different types of texts you will encounter and how to adjust your approach so you can get the most out of each text.

This is where the "mindful" in "mindful reading" comes in. If you have heard the word "mindful" it may have been in a different context, perhaps in reference to meditation, yoga, or Buddhism. When you are mindful you are "in the moment." You are not distracted or focused on anything else. Being mindful is a pretty tall order when there is so much around to distract us—smartphones ringing, text messages buzzing, screens blinking. Still, practicing mindful reading by being aware of how you read can help you develop as a reader and—by extension—as a writer. Reading mindfully means paying attention not just to the content of the text—what it says—but rather to the process of reading itself by adjusting how you read based on what the piece asks of you. Skimming something—a newspaper, perhaps—may be a perfectly suitable approach in a particular situation. Skimming, however, might not be the best approach when you are expected to answer specific questions about a more complex reading or connect it to other complex readings, as you will likely have to do in your college classes.

Mindful reading acts as a framework that is intended to remind you of the importance of becoming an active reader who makes careful and deliberate decisions about the reading strategies you might use. As you mindfully read, you will be learning about reading and also about yourself as a reader. These experiences can help you become an altogether stronger reader not just in this course but beyond it.

How this Book Enriches and Expands Your Reading Ability

"But," you may say, "I know how to read! I wouldn't have made it this far if I didn't." You are right—to an extent. You certainly know how to decode language in the ways reading is described in the opening to this introduction, and you can understand certain types of texts. But, in college, expectations change, including those associated with reading. You will need to work on your reading for several reasons:

1. You will be faced with more reading.
2. The types of reading you will be assigned will vary drastically depending on the discipline and the course.
3. You will be expected to read more complex texts.
4. You will be asked to complete more complex tasks associated with your reading.

These reasons suggest why it is important that you gain practice in different reading strategies.

As you move through your academic career you will likely find (if you haven't already) that texts from different disciplines demand different types of reading. While you may be used to reading literature in a certain way, that reading approach might not lend itself to that dense biological research study you have been assigned to read. Or, you may find that your go-to reading strategy of highlighting with that yellow marker might not cut it when faced with a jargon-ridden historical essay meant only for expert historians or that equally (but for different reasons) difficult psychology textbook. *A Writer's Guide to Mindful Reading* seeks to prepare you for all of these reading experiences by helping you develop a repertoire or toolkit of reading strategies to which you can turn so you are prepared to effectively read a range of texts as you move through the disciplines.

Although you may be using this textbook in an English or writing course, these reading strategies are useful across disciplines. In fact, I taught one student who regularly spoke about how becoming aware of and practicing various reading approaches within the mindful reading framework helped him to understand word problems in math class (math!). In an evaluation of one of my courses, another student described his use of the "Says/Does" approach in a History course. This reading strategy, which you will learn about in Chapter 2, involves going paragraph by paragraph noticing what each paragraph says—its content—and what each does—its function. The student explains, "In American Studies, I decided to try the 'Says/Does' approach when reading the Dred Scott case proved difficult due to its word choice. Breaking it down paragraph by paragraph proved very useful. If I see another cryptic piece in further history classes, I would return to the method."

Further developing your reading abilities is important work as recent studies have shown that college students and young adults, generally, struggle in this area. A study entitled "America's Skills Challenge: Millennials and the Future," published in 2015 by Educational Testing Services (ETS) found that "one half (50%) of America's millennials," defined as those born after 1980 who were 16–34 years of age in 2012 "failed to reach level 3 in literacy" (11), which tests how well respondents "identify, interpret, or evaluate one or more pieces of information, and often require varying levels of inference" (48). In other words, it tests how well one reads. Only 50% of American millennials met this minimum benchmark, highlighting the difficulty young adults have working with "pieces of information," what we might call sources or informational texts, which make up a large part of college-level reading material. Additionally, the SAT Verbal/Critical Reading Portion, as well as the ACT test, which is also often used for admissions and placement have shown declines in students' reading abilities: "In 2015 [the date of the most recent published study], the average score on the SAT verbal test was near historic lows" (par. 3). Based on 1.9 million students who took the ACT test in 2015, 46% of students met ACT's "college ready benchmark" on the Reading section, a decline from the 51% who did so in 2006. Most recently, in late 2016, the Stanford History Education Group at

Stanford University published a study entitled "Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning," which reports that middle-school through college-age students are "easily duped" when "it comes to evaluating information that flows through social media channels" (4). Accurately reading, understanding, evaluating, and incorporating credible information into one's writing is, of course, an important aspect of college-level writing.

Despite these dismal statistics, and although you still have a lot to learn and practice, your previous reading experiences can be useful to your current, college-level reading assignments. Completing the following exercise will help you reflect on these earlier experiences.

Ponder This

Take a moment to think back to something that you recently chose to read, something easy that posed no problems for you—maybe a blog entry, a novel, a newspaper article. Jot down a few sentences about that experience. You probably didn't think much about how you read it at the time, why you read it, or how you read it, especially if you chose it. The reading process likely never entered your mind. Now, think about something you read recently that you found was difficult—whether because of its vocabulary, its genre (i.e. the type of text it is), or its subject. Jot down a few sentences about that experience. I bet you became more self-conscious about your reading process. You may have decided to give up altogether or you might have used some strategies to help you work through the difficulty. You may have used a dictionary to help you understand some words or maybe you followed a hyperlink to another source hoping that would offer some guidance. These strategies are helpful, and they are ones that you may already have extensive practice using. This textbook will give you additional strategies, additional ways of reading, so that you never have to give up on a text, no matter how difficult, no matter the discipline, no matter the challenges that face you.

Won't This Kind of Reading Take Longer?

Now that you know that this textbook will give you strategies for reading and encourage you to take time to reflect on—think about—your reading, you are probably wondering: "Won't this kind of

reading take longer than just reading?" The answer is "not necessarily." Here's why: When you are reading mindfully and in the present moment, you realize immediately when you begin to zone out and you consider what you can do in that moment to refocus. You ask yourself questions about why your mind drifted. Perhaps you need a different reading strategy—one that will make the reading more relevant or comprehensible. And yes, it may take a minute to regroup, shift gears, and put another strategy into play, but you won't lose the time you would have lost had it taken you 15 minutes (and 8 pages!) to realize that you zoned out and have no idea what you just read, an experience we have all had.

At first, being mindful may seem unnatural and even tedious at times. You may wonder, "Why can't I JUST read without doing all of this extra work?" Here's why: Research shows that in order to **transfer**—or apply—what is learned in one course to another, students need to actively think about—or reflect on—what they have learned. In other words, they need to be mindful. If students simply go through the motions and complete assignments and readings without any awareness of them and their uses beyond the present class, students are not likely to draw on those earlier educational experiences when faced with similar experiences later in their academic careers and beyond. So, taking the time to reflect on what you are learning about reading and about yourself as a reader as you move through the selections in this book will save you time later since it will position you to apply all that you learn here to other courses and contexts. This reflective work will allow you to more easily see connections between the activities and assignments included in this book and those you will encounter outside of this course. Plus, the truth is that it is impossible to "just" read. Whether or not you pay close attention to the reading process, you are still unconsciously making decisions when you read. You are choosing to pay closer attention to certain parts of the text, you are slowing down in some moments, speeding up at others, maybe skipping some parts altogether. This textbook is simply asking you to become more aware of those habits and strategies; it's enriching and adding to them; and it's positioning you to consciously bring them with you to courses and contexts beyond this class.

Speaking of how this work can help you beyond your present course and even beyond school altogether, students in my classes regularly mention how what they learn about reading helps them "read" the world around them. One student explained that just as she was expected to read different viewpoints on the same topic, she now "watch[es] both NBC and Fox to get different perspectives." At first glance this example may not seem to have anything to do with reading, but the student is describing how she reads these perspectives in relation to each other, recognizing that each has its own biases. This student will not simply accept what she hears or reads, but will deliberately consider and compare that information to other ideas and perspectives she encounters. That consciousness, that awareness, is what mindful reading seeks to foster.

What is "Academic Writing"?

So far, this book has talked a lot about reading as if forgetting that it is a "writer's" guide to mindful reading. This has probably left you wondering, "What kind of writing will we be doing?" This book engages you in what is often called academic writing. You might think about academic writing as an ongoing scholarly conversation. In fact, it has become common to use philosopher and rhetorician Kenneth Burke's description of a conversation as a metaphor for academic writing:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

I bet if you take a few minutes you can come up with an instance in which you walked into a room—like the parlor above—to find a conversation already in progress. Maybe this happened to you at work or at lunch with friends. You arrived to see that folks were already well into a discussion. You likely didn't jump right in, but, instead, you took a minute or two to get a sense of the conversation, what they were talking about, and who was saying what. Only then—after listening and evaluating the situation—did you participate. In the "conversation" of academic writing, you will be expected to do precisely that, which you have likely already done many times in your life. You will need to "listen for a while" to what others have said about the subject until you "[catch] the tenor of the argument," to use Burke's words. Ultimately, you will have to contribute something to the discussion; you will have to "put in your oar" so to speak. But it doesn't end there. You will then need to address how others respond to your contribution and you may need to qualify or revise it. Others will likely respond again, you will do the same, and so on. In less metaphorical terms, many of the writing assignments in this book expect you to read (and understand) what others have said about a subject before you can think alongside them and write a response or develop an argument.

The Importance of Annotation to Academic Writing

Annotation, marking up a text, is a first step toward participating in academic conversations. When you annotate, you write as you read by responding to that reading in the form of notes, comments, and questions in the margins of your text. This may be done digitally or by hand. These marginal notes represent the initial ways in which you are participating in the scholarly conversation with the author of the text. Your initial contributions to the conversation can be expanded to help you develop more detailed responses in the form of longer, more formal writing assignments, which will likely demand that you qualify and revise those responses as you continue to participate in scholarly conversations. Because annotation requires that you write as you read, it might be thought of as a bridge between those two practices. In fact, research has shown that simultaneous practice in reading and writing leads to stronger abilities in both.

Digitally Annotating the Selections in this Textbook

You have several options for digitally annotating them, including the following:

1. You may use the Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is available for free download at https://get.adobe.com/reader. This program will allow you to highlight and add sticky notes to any of the readings printed in the textbook. You can save your documents with the notes and share them.
2. You may download an annotation management system like Diigo for free at https://www.diigo.com. The basic, free service will allow you to annotate up to 100 webpages and PDFs.
3. You may add sticky notes to any webpage with https://www.mystickies.com. You will need to sign up (it's free) and install a Chrome Browser extension.
4. You may download https://web.hypothes.is, an open-source digital annotation management system that allows you to annotate anything on the Web and share those annotations. You will need to register for an account and install a browser extension. The "Education" section of the website includes a "Quick Start Guide for Students" and other useful resources.

Reading and Writing to Make Meaning

Notice that throughout this introduction, both reading and writing are described as active, creative practices. This textbook imagines reading as an exercise in *creating* meaning, not *finding* it.

Take a minute to consider the difference between the acts of creating and finding. Conceiving of reading as *finding* meaning suggests that the text holds the meaning and it is the reader's job to simply locate the meaning therein rather than take part in how the text's meaning is created. When we think about reading as an act of creation, we might imagine a reader who brings her background, previous reading experiences, culture, religion, and worldview with her to the reading. All of this contributes to how that reader creates meaning from the text. Think about it this way: If meaning was located (or hidden) in a text then each time you read that text it would mean the same thing to you. Every reading experience of the text would be exactly the same. This isn't the case, though. Have you ever read a story when you were much younger and returned to it a decade later to find that it means something different to you? The story hasn't changed; it's you who has changed! That change affects how you make or create meaning from the story. Sometimes, unfortunately, that change means that you end up disliking a book you once loved or it could mean the opposite and you end up loving a book you couldn't stand as a youngster. Neuroscientist Richard Restak explains this phenomenon as follows: "As a result of the lifetime plasticity of the brain, we're literally a different person than the person who read the book the first time." No matter the kind of feelings that the act of rereading may evoke, this very scenario—that texts mean differently to us at different times—demonstrates that the reader and the text *create meaning together*.

Along the same lines, you will likely notice that as you participate in class discussions about the reading selections in this book, your classmates may have noticed different elements than you. They may think the piece means something different. They are not wrong. The selection does mean differently to them because their reading experience has been different from yours. Because of qualities they bring to the text—their background, previous reading experiences, culture, religion, worldview, and so on—they paid attention to different aspects of the text and so came away with different understandings of it. That's not to say that anything goes when reading since the text must support all readings, but rather that meaning does not reside in the text alone.

How This Book Is Organized

By way of conclusion, this section provides an overview of how *A Writer's Guide to Mindful Reading* is organized. The book is divided into two parts with Chapter 5 (in Part Two) serving as a bridge between them. Part One includes the instructional apparatus: it teaches you about the reading strategies, provides writing instruction; and explains multimodal composing. Entitled

"Readings on Reading," Chapter 5 is comprised of selections on the subject of reading, which will support your understanding of the very concept of reading and set you on a path toward becoming a more reflective reader. All of the readings in Chapters 6-10 address technology and its relationship to some other idea or concept (e.g. Gender and Technology) and are accompanied by questions and long writing assignments. These assignments will help you understand, respond to, and synthesize the readings, as well as apply ideas and concepts within them. Parts One and Two, however, are not totally distinct. As you are asked to complete the assignments throughout Part Two, you are directed to the chapter in Part One that can help you complete each assignment. For example, if an assignment asks you to complete a rhetorical reading, a link in that assignment provides the chapter number from Part One in which rhetorical reading is described. As you move between the two parts of this book, learning and applying the reading strategies while writing in response to the included readings, you will become that mindful reader who is prepared to engage the range of texts you will encounter as a college student and beyond. To further support your understanding of the terms and concepts associated with mindful reading, a glossary is included at the end of this textbook. Words that appear in boldface throughout this textbook are included in that glossary.

A Note about the Links to Readings

In many cases rather than providing you with the full text of a reading you are provided with a link that takes you directly to the reading online. Please note that in many instances you are reading a selection on a website, such as *The New Yorker* or *Wired*, that requires a subscription after you visit a certain number of times. Keep this in mind as you are working from those readings.

A Note about Accessibility

This textbook strives to be accessible to a diverse readership by offering a flexible user experience. The textbook is available in different formats, including ePub. In addition, the textbook contains a navigable table of contents, is searchable, and allows viewers to adjust the size of the text and other textual elements using the "zoom" feature while reading. As explained in Chapter 2, the "read aloud and paraphrase" reading strategy can be modified for deaf readers. Please contact the publisher with any additional questions about accessibility.

Acknowledgments

A textbook project of this kind is only possible with the help of many people. Its first editor, John Sullivan, was a great supporter, and his keen eye and guidance were instrumental in the development of this book. I am grateful to Mike Palmquist, the textbook's ultimate editor, for his belief in this project and his feedback and advice throughout the development and publication processes. I would also like to thank copyeditor Brandy Bippes for taking such care with the project, and for her many insights about its design and layout. For being so generous with her time and expertise on open educational resources, I thank University of Connecticut Librarian Kathy Labadorf. Without Kathy's guidance, I would not have considered publishing a textbook in this format. I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues in First-Year Writing at UConn's Waterbury campus, including Lois Lake Church, Daniela Falco, Kelly Jarvis, and Sam Robinson, whose support is constant and whose excitement about this project has been both affirming and contagious. Also at UConn, I am grateful to Pam Bedore, Lisa Blansett, Brenda Brueggemann, Serkan Gorkemli, Oliver Hiob, and Tom Recchio who took time away from their own projects and teaching to offer guidance and encouragement. I must also thank Edward Neth in the Chemistry Department at UConn for sharing the insights gleaned from developing his own open textbook and for paving the way for other UConn professors to publish in this format.

Beyond my colleagues at UConn, I am grateful to Kirstin Collins Hanley who has been a sounding board on this project and many others, as well as a steadfast friend since graduate school. Finally, I must thank my husband David and the rest of my family for their unwavering support and valuable advice that saw me through the many challenges this project presented.

Copyright Acknowledgments

I must thank the writers who have generously allowed me to reprint their excellent work in this textbook. When I first heard Stacey Waite read her poetry, we were both graduate students at the University Pittsburgh, and I was blown away. I am grateful to Stacey and Tupelo Press for granting me permission to reprint "On the Occasion of Being Mistaken for a Man by Security Personnel at Newark International Airport." I must also thank Sarah Davis for her permission to reprint "The 'Blurred Lines' Effect: Popular Music and the Perpetuation of Rape Culture," which she wrote in a research writing course in 2014 at the University of Connecticut. It is an honor to publish her essay in this textbook as it is a wonderful model of engaging, persuasive, and thoughtful writing, and I hope it will be an inspiration to other undergraduates.

I would also like to thank Carrie Stewart at NCTE for helping me secure the rights to reprint the selections in Chapter 6: Readings on Reading; Dan Parker at Oxford UP for granting me permission to reprint blog entries from OUP's Blog; Bryan Troyer at Grist.org for permission to reprint Wendell Berry's "Environmentalists Have Given Up too Much by Not Being Radical Enough" and Amelia Urry's "If you Think Technology Has no Place in the National Parks, Think Again;" Matthew Smoot at xkcd.com for his guidance in reprinting "The Pace of Modern Life;" and Karen Gagne at *Orion Magazine* for permission to reprint Derrick Jensen's "Forget Shorter Showers."

For Further Reading

"America's Skills Challenge: Millennials and the Future." ETS, 2015. http://www.ets.org/millennials

Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. University of California Press, 1941.

"The Condition of College and Career Readiness," *ACT*, 2015. http://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/CCCR15-NationalReadinessRpt.pdf

"Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning." https://sheg.stanford.edu/upload/V3LessonPlans/Executive%20Summary%2011.21.16.pdf

Kassuba, Tanja and Sabine Kastner. "The Reading Brain." *Scientific American*. 12 May 2015.

Mar, Raymond A. et al. "Exploring the Link Between Reading Fiction and Empathy: Ruling Out Individual Differences and Examining Outcomes." *Communications*, vol. 34, 2009.

Oatley, Keith. *Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction*. Wiley, 2011.

"Performance on SAT Verbal/Critical Reading and Writing Exams." *Humanities Indicators*, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2016, http://www.humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicatordoc.aspx?i=23

Rayner, Keith. "Eye Movements in Reading and Information Processing: 20 Years of Research." *Psychological Bulletin,* vol. 124, no.3, 1998, pp. 372–422.

Restak, Richard. "Empathy and Other Mysteries." *American Scholar*, 1 December 2010, https://theamericanscholar.org/empathy-and-other-mysteries/#