

THE FOUR-LEVEL CHARTING PROCESS

STEP ONE: THE INITIAL PROCESS

How to get a grasp of the whole paper

Step 1

Decide to love the paper - feel it, ritualize affection, pronounce the author's name.

Step 2

Explore the entire contents - look at enunciations, titles, opening and closing paragraphs, words that jump out at you, and guess what the whole paper is about.

Step 3

Number the paragraphs in the paper.

Step 4

Lay out the chart: horizontally on a piece of paper, centered on the paper and number spaces to correspond with paragraphs. Do this very quickly. This is a working chart, not a final copy.

Step 5

Scan for structures - don't read, but look quickly for transitional clues, numerals, italics, transitional words. Read, at the most, the first four words of each paragraph. Record findings on work chart below the line.

Step 6

Scan for contents - simple topical headings - read, at the most, first and last sentence of each paragraph and scribble findings below the line. Do not necessarily start with the first paragraph, but start where topics emerge easily. Then complete all the paragraphs.

STEP TWO: THE DEPTH DIALOGUE

How to ask the paper good questions and hear answers

Step 1

What meanings and questions are raised by the scanning data?

Step 2

What are the sections emerging in your chart? What functions do they play (introduction, conclusion, transition, etc.)? Give each section an impressionistic title. Record above the line.

Step 3

You still have not read the paper. Where do you need more data? Ask your questions, read in appropriate places, and record findings above the line.

Step 4

What are the questions you are now raising about a) the structure of the paper, b) the content of the paper. Read to complete the picture of the paper and answer your questions. Don't read just to be reading. Keep your side of the dialogue engaged.

Step 5

Organize your findings into a total picture above the line. Give most of the paragraphs a title. Title all sections in a consistent way. Give a good title to the whole paper.

Step 6

Ascertain where the key questions and paragraphs of the paper are for further explanation into the heart of the paper.

STEP THREE: FOUR LEVELS OF CHARTS

LEVEL 1: THE TOPICAL:

The impressions of the broad inclusive images of content. Simple answers to the question: "What is this section about?"

LEVEL 2: THE FUNCTIONAL:

The external structural relations of all the sections of your chart. (Introduction, Conclusion, Main Point, Transition, etc.) Simple answers to the question: What role does this section play in the paper?

Level 3: THE PROPOSITIONAL:

In your own words, write a brief proposition stating what is in each paragraph, each section of your structure, and finally the whole paper. The propositions organize the interior content of each paragraph and section.

Level 4: THE EXISTENTIAL:

This level has to do with what the paper's message is doing to you personally. It is never absent, it is engagement with the paper.

The following questions help structure the existential level charting. Turn your holding chart over and answer these four questions on the back:

1. What shifts in image has this paper provoked for you?
2. What is its personal address to your current life?
3. What positive contribution has this paper made to your self-understanding?
4. What is your critical appraisal of this paper?

OTHER TYPES OF CHARTS

Teaching Chart: Used when teaching a seminar. Includes key points, good questions, images, lecturettes, illustrations, amount of time spent on each section, etc.

Art Chart: Simplified chart which, like a grid, holds the structure of the paper in a way that you can easily hold in your imagination. Adding colour and heavy lines is helpful for holding the drama of the paper.