



My Thinking Booth: Essential Qualities of a Reading Space

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1. I open my green folder and take out my Biology lecture notes and its complementing textbook chapters, methodically placing them on the large table. The ascent up the wide staircase enclosed by pale green tiles has led me to the fourth floor of the Newman Library. Tall windows wrap around the side of the room, allowing natural light to encompass the space. I sit at a grey booth with a maroon backboard that is perfectly placed beside each set of windows. I have personally claimed this first booth, table 4126, as my favorite place to read on this beautiful Blacksburg campus. After admiring the space, I look down, organize myself, and begin the reading for the day. In this particular space, my access to concrete reading materials, the cohesive layout of the room, and the calming environment allows me to have a positive outlook on reading resulting in a more productive state of mind.
2. Reading can be done in various forms, but I have always found it easier when I have a hard copy in hand. It is constantly present in our lives and now commonly done on different electronic devices. I usually find myself reading news articles or social media posts on my phone daily. When doing this, I am in my room laying down on my soft bed. But, I personally classify reading as sitting down with a sustained piece either for a class or for fun. Most of the time, I read for classes whether it's chapters in a textbook or a specific piece of literature. Recently, I mostly spend my days reading several lengthy sets of notes and textbook chapters for my Biology class. Whenever I read I always have to have a physical copy of what I am working on.

Keywords: booth, comfortable, description, feel, Newman Library, reading space, spatial analysis, windows

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The feeling of the white crisp pages ignites an enthusiasm within me which marks the start of a productive day. Another reason why I enjoy physical copies is because they allow me to visually see how many pages I have left. I am a very big visual learner, so having the pages with me helps organize myself. While reading, I also enjoy writing down notes. I have found that by printing out what I am reading, I am easily able to write annotations in the margins of the papers. I can see my notes clearly written on the same page which helps me understand concepts and write questions for future references. Another advantage of having a print version of a text is that I can take it wherever I want. Sometimes with electronic devices the internet might not work or the battery might die. I dealt with this at the start of the semester when I had trouble with the wifi on campus and was specifically unable to access a reading for my Pathways Psychology Major class. So, I have found that having a print version of a reading is the best option and never prevents me from doing my work. A computer gives ample room for distractions such as Youtube, Netflix, and Instagram which hinders me from getting my work done well and efficiently. Concrete pages never leave room for these interruptions overall making me more proficient which is always a rewarding feeling. The sense of pages in my hands and the zero distractions that comes from having a hard copy of a reading makes me enjoy it more which increases my productivity.

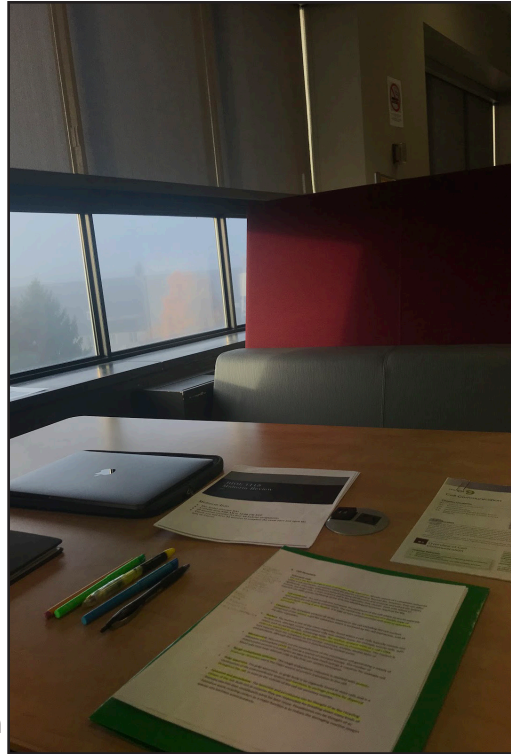


Figure 1: A first person point of view of my methodically placed materials on an early foggy morning.

3. Besides printing out my materials, I have found that the space I am in, particularly the layout of the room, enhances my reading experience. Coming to Virginia Tech I was nervous and unsure if I

would find a space that would help me feel comfortable and enjoy reading. I knew I would have to tackle lots of readings, so finding the right space would be crucial to my college experience. After many failed attempts of studying in my dorm room, I decided to take a trip to the fourth floor of Newman Library. After climbing the three flights of stairs and walking past the first room filled with square tables, there is a second room that is much bigger and contains windows wrapping around the side of the building. As I wandered around that room I was particularly attracted to the first booth placed by the large windows; table 4126.

The soft, leathered booth provides a sense of comfort which allows me to read for hours on end without feeling any pain or discomfort while sitting. The large proportion of the wood-like table allows me to sprawl out all of my papers.

4. This enables me to stay organized and have ample space to do my readings. The grey and black booth sits directly next to the long set of windows on the wall. The paneled windows bring in the perfect amount of fresh sunlight into the room. When looking outside, I am able to see the Hogwarts-like architecture of the school buildings as well as the color changing leaves. The particular placement of the table next to the window not only provides the perfect reading light, but brings a sense of relaxation into the room (Figure 1). Whenever I am tired or overwhelmed by what I am reading, the beautiful view of the Blacksburg campus makes me happy and calms me down at times when I am stressed. In the last couple of weeks, tall whiteboard dividers have been placed next to the booth (Figure 2). This gives a sense of privacy and allows me to feel like I am in my own world

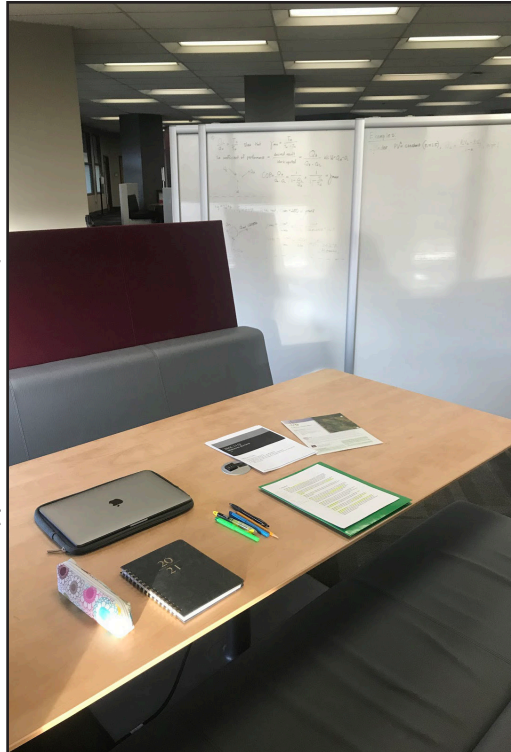


Figure 2: The white board enclosed space that provides a sense of privacy.

when in actuality I share this space with others. The size of the room itself prevents me from feeling claustrophobic which allows me to think clearly when reading. I have found that the large space helps me open my mind and really explore what I am reading. The area is filled with all different sized tables and chairs. The placement of the seats makes the room feel very cohesive. Surveying the room, I gain comfort from the arrangement of the room itself and my placement within it. I have found that the color panel of the fourth floor also affects my view on what I am reading. The furniture is mostly made up of white, grey, maroon and black tones. These colors create a soothing environment. Typically, I find myself feeling anxious or distracted in a room with bright colors, so the neutral tones found in the library allow me to feel peaceful and focus on what I read. Each of these elements work together to create a cohesive space that is easy to work in. The furniture and unified layout of the floor makes me feel comfortable and fully focus on what I am reading which ultimately increases my enjoyment.

5. A calming environment that promotes a positive relationship with reading and allows me to focus in order to be productive is the most important aspect of a reading space for me. The environment of the fourth floor itself is serene, but not completely silent. Though the space is relatively quiet, I often hear the faint sound of students' whispers echoing within the sizable area. The quietness allows me to completely focus on what I am reading with the option of still being able to talk to peers if I wish to confer about the reading itself. I also like that it is not completely silent because sometimes silence can give me a sense of eeriness which prevents me from focusing. I tend to feel uncomfortable in silence, so I typically stray away from it. The leveled atmosphere blocks out all distractions which is beneficial to me because I am able to completely focus on the words I am reading and am able to get it done with ease. When reading in the library, I always catch an acute smell of warm coffee lingering around the adjacent booths. I myself typically read while enjoying a medium iced latte from Dunkin Donuts. The caffeine keeps me alert and having the drink itself motivates me to read and write. Though it may not always be morning, having a coffee while reading always encourages me to start the day off right and complete my readings. I have noticed that when I do not have coffee I am not able to function properly and I lack the same vigor to get work done. No matter the day I am having

I always make sure to get that fresh cup of coffee to keep me going. Another important aspect of this particular environment is that the concept of time is not present. The placement of the grey booth has no clocks in sight. This feature permits me to only focus on what I am reading and not depend on time. When at the library I have found that hours have passed of me reading without me even realizing it. This helps make reading an enjoyable task since I used to stay away from it because I thought it would take me too long.

6. I have come to learn that by printing out my reading materials and being in a space that is cohesive and peaceful positively impacts my view on reading and motivates me to get it done. By printing out my notes or articles, I have a tangible experience with the material and I am able to make personal notes about the reading. This makes me excited and drives me to get my reading done in order to enjoy myself, sit back, and reflect on my accomplishments of the day. The space I am in also completely changes my outlook on reading and can either make it a more or less enjoyable task. The layout of the fourth floor of the Newman Library that includes comfortable furniture and large tables makes me feel cozy while doing my readings. I feel comfortable and happy in the space which then translates to my mindset when reading. The Newman Library, specifically table 4126, provides the perfect environment which has made me realize how essential a calm surrounding is to my productivity and mental state. The calming environment largely due to the quiet floor also allows me to completely focus. This once again makes me more productive and limits distractions which permits me to really get into my reading and enjoy it. I am so happy I found the perfect space that works for me that turns reading from a daunting task into an enjoyable experience that makes me productive. Through the reading space I found here at Virginia Tech, I've realized my own terms and conditions that are essential to a reading space for me. Whether it's the white, grey, maroon color panel of the booths or the echoing of whispers from the students talking about the next game day, these aspects work together to make up my reading space. Though there won't always be Newman Library fourth floor booth 4126, I intend to keep the essential parts of it with me as I journey on to other parts of the world in hopes of being able to call another reading space my own again.

Project Two: Reading Spaces - Assignment Description

Overview

“Gen Z students don’t read any more.”

Have you heard this? I have, and usually this message is from someone who grew up in a very different time and culture (pre cell phones and social media) and is delivered with negative judgment. Is it really a fact or simply an assumption? And what constitutes “reading” anyway? We are looking at this because college students usually have to tackle a great deal of reading, and that can be both a strain and a gift. In Project Two, you’ll explore this in two parts: first by looking at what, how, where, you read, and second by looking at how reading space(s) affect your reading and thinking. This will draw on your skills in observation, reflection, and analysis. Your assignment is to write an essay about a physical space in your life that is conducive to reading and/or writing. You will consider what we have learned about rhetorical understanding—i.e the Rhetor, the Audience, the Message, and the Purpose, and apply this to a physical space.

Part One: Reflection / Prewriting

Ponder the four questions below and take notes, practicing copia, which is a method of prewriting by putting down more information than you need and deciding what to cut out and what to expand upon later. This will become the content of your assignment. The bulk of your paper is, of course, your writing, but you will want to take photos to add in for clarification or detail. One photograph (or illustration, if you’re so inclined) is required to provide as evidence.

1. What and why do you read? Does it count as reading if you are on your iPhone, glancing Twitter or Instagram? How about if you look over a political flier or read your friend’s rant on Facebook? Or does it have to be a sustained piece of writing like an essay on a blog or an article about Covid-19 in the newspaper or a text chapter or an honest-to-goodness hard copy book? Do you read just for entertainment, to gather essential information, or do you avoid reading as much as possible?
2. How do you prefer to read? You probably have a preference. Are you hooked on e-formats? Do you prefer big or small screens? Do you still like to hold something made of paper in your hands? Ask yourself why you like what you like.
3. What are your reading habits? Are you methodical, planning specific blocks of time, preparing your space, and carefully taking notes? Do you read with specific goals? Do you resist and procrastinate then plow through, highlighting like crazy? Or are you somewhere in the middle? And how do your habits work for or against you, especially as a college student?

Given what you just discussed, questions 1-3, what reading space(s) work best for you? This is where we get to the heart of this assignment.

4. What are your reading spaces? When you are reading to learn, do you sit a comfortable chair in a perfectly quiet space where everything is blocked out and you are alone with your thoughts? Do you have a favorite coffee shop or study corner somewhere? Do you need to be in natural light? Is it best if there's food within reach or music in the background? What works best for you to really help you get into the reading?

Actually spend some time in a physical reading space that works well for you, and figure out what is it about this space that works. Draw on your five senses. Also consider the purpose of the space. Does it carry a rhetorical or symbolic message? What visual or textual evidence gives meaning to the space? Is there something in particular that helps you focus and absorb and get into your reading? (Note: For those of you who are sick of your dorm rooms, here is a handy guide to the spaces [Links to an external site.](#) you might visit on campus.)

Part Two: Writing your draft

Looking at all of the information you gathered, you should have a good sense of what contributes to your best reading. In this essay, your goals are to:

1. Present readers (peers, your instructor, and possible other audiences) with a comprehensive picture of your processes as a reader, based on questions 1, 2, & 3 above.)
2. Describe your preferred reading space in detail, making connections between your space and your process.
3. Articulate some clear conclusions about the efficacy of your process. To what extent does a physical space affect your reading process. Is your process working for you? Is there something you should change? Everything in your essay is leading to this point.

Deadlines and Specifications

- A half-draft (700 words) is due in your Google Folder (as a Google Doc) and posted for Peer Review no later than the end of the day on Tuesday, October 13.
- Make sure the final draft has:
 - At least five pages typed and double-spaced with page numbers and a proper header. No more than seven pages.
 - A catchy title
 - One image or figure incorporated with a caption (image description)
- For Peer Review, please post your document as a text upload on the discussion board and comment on the threads. This is to ensure no paper goes unreviewed.
- Project Two and Invention Portfolio are due in your Google Folder no later than the end of the day on Sunday, October 25.

Invention Portfolio Contents

The invention portfolio amounts to a small collection of writings, notes, reflections,

and annotations that lend a broader base to your thinking through and deciding about directions to take for Project Two. Invention is a key rhetorical concept in that it names the processes and practices relating to how we come up with what we write or what we say when we speak. With this in mind, the Invention Portfolio is a collection of smaller, everyday writing prompted for you to do as the project begins to take shape.

(Note: This list may change as our time on the project unfolds.)

Grading Breakdown and Rubric

Grades for Project Two will be returned to in Canvas using the rubric tool and Grades area of the course. The rubric assigns values to the following criteria:

- Specific accounts of three materials, scenes, devices, or habits - Each descriptive account includes specific details, sufficient to situate it and provide context.
- Balanced and purposefully arranged moments - The descriptive accounts are balanced (approximately equal length) and arranged with purpose.
- Overall development (inc. title and length) - The project honors specifications concerning title, length, and any other formatting noted in class.
- Style - The project reflects control and consistency, which is evident in the presentation of understandable, accessible syntax (word order) and diction (word choice), regardless of multilingual and vernacular variation.
- Photographic evidence - The project presents compelling photographic evidence with detailed captions.
- Invention Portfolio - Evaluated based on completion and thoughtful responses.

Instructor: Annie Raab (MFA GTA)

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