

Pulling Together the 5 Ss: Stitching, Stance, Style, Structure, and Sources
Steve Fabian, Princeton University, The Writing Program
Course: Religion, Myth, and Ritual

Lesson objective: Practice close reading of a text for the identification of important essay elements as a method of fusing the processing of reading content with technical writing skills;

Additional outcomes: Small group effectiveness; working from small groups to larger group context

Total estimated time: ~45 minutes

Assignment sequence that's underway: I used this lesson near the end of the course, in the 20th class session.

Assigned reading: Barbara Meyerhoff, "The Deer-Maize-Peyote Symbol Complex among the Huichol Indians of Mexico"

Step 1. Break into 3 groups of 4 (15-20 min.) to discuss the reading

Group 1: Stitching, Stance, Style: Be able to provide brief description of stance and style, and several examples of good stitching (or bad or where it can be improved and how).

Group 2: What is the structure of the article? (Reconstruct a basic outline, either based on topics or main points) How does the structure contribute to or detract from the author's argument?

Group 3: Source use and evidence: What are the main sources for information? How does Meyerhoff substantiate her claim(s)? How effectively does Meyerhoff work borrowed info into her essay? Where does she seem to need additional material?

Step 2. Share results with the class as a whole (15-20 min.)

Share main results as class; recap author's main claim(s); is her argument effective? How are Deer-Maize-Peyote one? How are they the Huichols? How significant are symbols in religious thought, socio-cultural identity, and in helping people adapt to and cope with change?

Step 3. Concluding Thoughts (5-10 min.)

What does this exercise tell us about some academic writing in the social sciences? How has it contributed to our understanding of academic writing? How will having done this exercise help you in your analysis and writing?