

Looking back on all the assignments I've worked through throughout this semester, I'm starting to see how much my mindset about reading and writing has changed. Before, I used to think reading was just about taking in information—reading something, getting the facts, and that's it. But after working on these different projects, I realized that reading is actually a lot more active than that. It's more like a conversation, where you're bringing your own experiences, opinions, and even assumptions to the text. You're not just receiving information; you're shaping what it means to you. That's something I never really thought about before, and it's made me more aware of how personal reading, and writing about what you read, can actually be.

When I worked on the annotated bibliography assignment, I learned that research isn't just about collecting a bunch of articles and throwing them together. It's about really looking at each source, figuring out if it's useful, if it fits what you're trying to argue, and how it connects to everything else you're thinking about. It forced me to slow down and be more intentional with my research instead of rushing to find the first few things that popped up online. I realized that creating an annotated bibliography is almost like building the foundation of a building. Choosing the right pieces or the whole thing will fall apart later. That project definitely made me feel more confident about tackling bigger research assignments in the future.

The assignment where I read and reflected on Jesmyn Ward's *Cracking the Code* felt more personal to me because it wasn't just about summarizing what she said, it was about having my own reaction to it. I liked how the assignment encouraged us to use our own experiences and observations in our response. It made me realize that good writing isn't about keeping your personal voice out, it's about bringing your perspective into the conversation. I learned that creating "new knowledge" doesn't mean inventing some brand new idea out of nowhere;

sometimes it just means looking at a familiar idea in a new light because of what you've lived or noticed yourself. That was really empowering to me, because it showed that my experiences do matter when I'm responding to a text.

Finally, the argumentative research essay was a huge challenge, but in a good way. Instead of just summarizing other people's ideas, I had to form my own argument and back it up with evidence. The biggest thing I took away from this was the importance of asking questions, such as "why" and "what if" questions that push the topic into more interesting territory. I also learned how important it is to answer the "so what?" question—to explain why anyone should even care about what I'm writing. That made the project feel a lot more meaningful because it wasn't just about completing an assignment; it was about convincing someone that the way I see the topic matters.

Overall, these assignments made me realize that reading, writing, and thinking critically all fit together. They taught me that my voice is important, and that engaging with a text means more than just understanding it—it means adding to the conversation. Honestly, that's something I'll take with me way beyond just this class.