

Tl;dr (too long; didn't read):  
Why Reading and Writing Matter in  
the Age of Distraction

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# Goals for this talk

- Understand who our students are and why reading makes a difference
- Understand the nature of reading as a process
- Focus on goal of academic critical literacy
- Grasp the impact of technology re: distraction
- Know what eye-tracking data reveal
- See how distraction management can improve reading, writing and academic critical literacy

# New data about students

- 26% are “traditional” (Dickerson in *Free Press*)
  - (US Dept. of Education studies)
- Poor readers (not at grade level in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup>) more likely to drop out and more likely to end up in jail. (From keynote at Student Success Conference)

# Understanding reading

- Psycholinguistic definition: Getting meaning from print.
- Features
  - Fast
  - Meaning-driven
  - Only “incidentally visual” (Kolers, 1968)

# Observation exercise

- Reader and observer pairs, please
- Read a book—comprehension check coming
- Observer should watch the reader's eyes
- Switch roles
- Observation discussion
- Relevance for eye tracking

# Reading is “incidentally visual”

- Read upcoming passage once and look at me when done.
- Comprehension quiz coming.
- Use glasses or not as needed.

# The Boat in the Basement

**A man was building a boat in his basement. When he was done, he discovered that the the boat was too wide to go though the door, so he had to take the boat a part to get it out. He should of planned ahead.**



# The Telephone Pole by Charles Baxter

**Outside a man's window stood a  
a telephone poll, in which birds  
had dug several holes. Because  
the birds had caused all this  
trouble, he decided that  
that the telephone poll had to be cut  
down. The man called telephone  
company, which sent a truck out.**



# Healthy reading= Academic critical literacy

Academic critical literacy is best defined as the psycholinguistic processes of getting meaning from or putting meaning into print and/or sound, images, and movement, on a page or screen, used for the purposes of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and application; these processes develop through formal schooling and beyond it, at home and at work, in childhood and across the lifespan and are essential to human functioning in a democratic society. (Horning, 2012)

# Distraction as a problem

- Carr (2011), *The Shallows*—superficial reading on the Internet
- Richtels (2014), *A Deadly Wandering*—car accident resulting in death due to distraction of cell phone
- AP/NWP Teacher Survey 2012

# More on attention and distraction

- Atchley & Lane (2014) “Cognition in the Attention Economy”
- Leroy (2009) on “attention residue”
- Ericsson (2014) on deliberate practice needed for “deep work” (Newport, 2016) and developing expertise

# Findings on attention and distraction in reading and writing

- Paulson 2007-eye tracking among students in peer review
- Carter 2012-eye tracking among experts
- Anson and Schwegler 2012-eye tracking and error in peer review of student writing
- Keller 2014-case studies with HS seniors and FY college students managing technology

# Understanding and managing technology

- Research findings suggest clear strategies to achieve academic critical literacy
  - Understand impact of tech-accumulation & acceleration
  - Multitasking
  - Foraging and oscillating, intentional and not
  - Focus on errors' rhetorical implications
  - Sullivan & Thompson (2013)-How to manage distraction: It CAN be done!

# Strategies for distraction management

- *Deep Work* (Newport, 2016). Rules—give up social media, schedule email etc., control responding, engage in deliberate practice (requires no distraction and focused feedback)
- Keep in mind attention economy, attention residue.

# Exercise to try: focus and memorize

- To be, or not to be- that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them. To die- to sleep-  
No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
The heartache, and the thousand natural  
shocks that flesh is heir to.

Write it out

# Monday morning-what to do?

- Goal of academic critical literacy
- Novice/expert study shows experts have awarenesses and skills of critical literacy
- Work with students to understand how technology impacts their work and why distraction undermines performance
- Distraction management needed for learning faster and better—rules for deep work
- Focus on reading and writing as key tools
- We can do THAT...

Thanks for your **attention!**

Time for questions and discussion...