

READERSHIP INSTITUTE

Media Management Center at Northwestern University

Talk to a Reader

Many people can happily live their lives with only occasional reading of your newspaper. Others see it more often, yet spend little time with it. Clearly, peoples' reading habits will be different from yours, but so will their reading experience.

It may help to think of "experience" as the emotional or feelings-based reaction to reading the paper, which might sound like this: "It's a daily treat for me." Readers may also have a rational or fact-based experience, which sounds quite different: "I learn about things I need to know."

Your Assignment

Before the seminar, talk with one ordinary reader for 15 minutes or so. There's no fancy science to this; just pick someone between 18 and 34 who doesn't work for the paper in any way and isn't a relative or significant other.

Pick someone outside your normal world, perhaps a neighbor or friend, a server at your favorite eatery, or someone from your church or your kids' school. Although you'll come to the seminar with the views of only one reader, together we'll have views from a few dozen young adults. It's a start.

This isn't a reporter's interview or a cross-examination, so pay attention to the music, not just the words. Talk about how, why and how often your friend uses the newspaper. Take some notes and be prepared to talk about the results of your interview.

Some Questions to Get You Started

- When you start reading the paper, do you look forward to finishing it?
- Do you feel like your day is incomplete if you don't read the paper?
- Do you read in the same way every day? What attracts your attention?
- Do you talk with other people about what you've seen in the paper?
- Does the paper have stories about people who seem like you?
- Does it touch you emotionally sometimes – make you laugh or cry?
- Is the paper a reward for you, a break from other things?
- Are you spending more or less time with the paper these days? Why?
- Do you finish the stories you start reading, or just skim them?
- How important are the ads inside, and the inserts? Do you read those?