

HOW TO READ (HTR)

1. How does a writer help you to know what the essay is about?
2. How can you understand a long, unstructured sentence?
3. How can you see the relevance of the past to the present?
4. How can you cope with an unfamiliar example that is developed at length?
5. How do you deal with paragraph after paragraph of unfamiliar examples?
6. How can writing help you to make sense of a difficult sentence?

The Moral Equivalent of War
by William James

The war against war is going to be no holiday excursion or camping party.

The military feelings are too deeply grounded

Comment [WU1]: How does a writer help you to know what the essay is about? The title gives you a general idea of the topic. In this case, James is discussing how to have something similar to war (its equivalent) but which is moral (or ethical). His title also implies his assumption that war is immoral. All essays make assumptions like this. If you identify the purpose of the essay and its assumptions, you will be able to comprehend its argument.

Comment [WU2]: In his first sentence James is stating clearly what is the problem to which he is proposing a solution.

Comment [WU3]: HTR: A skillful essayist will usually tell you up front what his point or purpose is. It may not be in the first paragraph or in the first paragraph, but it will be in the introductory remarks. If you know what the writer's point or purpose is, then you will be able to relate the parts (individual statements) to the whole (the essay).

Comment [WU4]: HTR: When you know this is a problem/solution essay, that helps you to expect that the ideas will flow in a particular way. You know he'll say something about the problem and then will say something about the solution. The ability to anticipate what will happen is a very important aspect of reading. In fact, in the very next sentence of the essay, James fulfills his implied promise: He begins to explain the problem.

Comment [WU5]: HTR; You are confronted with a lengthy and unstructured sentence. What do you do? First, remember that every sentence is organized around two simple, essential components: a SUBJECT and a VERB.

Comment [WU6]: 1. Identify the GRAMMATICAL SUBJECT (who/what is doing something). In a complex sentence, the SUBJECT can appear in the middle or near the end of a sentence, but often you'll find it in the beginning.

Comment [WU7]: 2. Identify the VERB (what the SUBJECT is doing). There might be many VERBS in a sentence, but you're looking for the one that relates directly to the subject. It usually appear after the subject, but it might not be immediately after it. In this case, it is a VERB PHRASE, a collection of words that work together as a VERB.

3. You know you have identified the SUBJECT and VERB because together they create a complete sentence: THE MILITARY FEELINGS...ARE DEEPLY GROUNDED.

4. Now you can start to see that the rest of the sentence is elaborating on this preliminary statement. Each phrase is explaining something about a previous phrase, which can be read as a series of questions and answers:

Q: TOO DEEPLY GROUNDED FOR WHAT?

to abdicate ¹

Comment [WU8]: A: TO ABDICATE. Q: TO ABDICATE WHAT?

their place

Comment [WU9]: A: THEIR PLACE. Q: WHERE IS THEIR PLACE?

among our ideals

Comment [WU10]: A: AMONG OUR IDEALS. Q: HOW LONG WOULD THIS PLACE BE ABDICATED?

until better substitutes are offered.

Comment [WU11]: A: UNTIL BETTER SUBSTITUTES ARE OFFERED. Q: BETTER THAN WHAT?

than the glory and shame

Comment [WU12]: A: THAN THE GLORY AND SHAME. Q: WHOSE GLORY AND SHAME?

that come to nations as well as to individuals

Comment [WU13]: A: NATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS'. Q: WHAT CAUSES THE GLORY AND SHAME?

from the ups and downs of politics and the vicissitudes ² of trade.

Comment [WU14]: A: THE UPS AND DOWN OF POLITICS AND THE VICISSITUDES OF TRADE.

Page 2:

Comment [WU15]: How to make a statement about the past relevant to the present?

Yet ask those same people whether they would be willing, in cold blood, to start another civil war now to gain another similar possession, and not one man or woman would vote for the proposition. In modern eyes, precious though wars may be they must not be waged solely for the sake of the ideal harvest. Only when forced upon one, is a war now thought permissible.

Comment [WU16]: refers to the positive results of the Civil War, which was discussed in the previous sentence.

Comment [WU17]: This statement, that war is only thought permissible when forced upon a country, seems to still be true today. But as we discussed in class, it seems possible to get into a war (like the Iraq War) for reasons that now seem pretty foolish.

Comment [WU18]: How to deal with an unfamiliar example that is developed and discussed at length?

Comment [WU19]: In this entire paragraph, is illustrating and elaborating on his first sentence, using examples that members of his audience are familiar with, but that we are not very familiar with.

Page 3:

Comment [WU20]: When you're confronted with a situation like this in a reading, there are a few things you can do. Which approach you take depends on why you're reading it and what you need to be able to do with it. You can:
1) learn more about the example through research, which may just be a matter of asking a professor;
2) accept the writer's statement and don't worry about the examples;
3) without getting stuck in the details, try to figure out what the point of the example is, and how it relates to his main point.

History is a bath of blood. The *Illiad* ³ is one long recital of how Diomedes and Ajax, Sarpedon and Hector killed. No detail of the wounds they made is spared us, and the

¹ Abdicate- give up or renounce

² Vicissitudes - changing phases or conditions (ups and downs)

³ The *Illiad* – A Greek epic poem about the Trojan war.

Greek mind fed upon the story. Greek history is a panorama of jingoism⁴ and imperialism -- war for war's sake, all the citizens being warriors. It is horrible reading...

Page 3:

Those wars were purely piratical. Pride, gold, women, slaves excitement were their only motives. In the Peloponnesian⁵ war, for example, the Athenians ask the inhabitants of Melos (the island where the "Venus de Milo" was found), hitherto⁶ neutral, to own their lordship. The envoys meet, and hold a debate... [and on and on].

Page 9:

The militarily-patriotic and the romantic-minded everywhere, and especially the professional military class, refuse to admit for a moment that war may be a transitory phenomenon in social evolution. The notion of a sheep's paradise like that revolts, they say, our higher imagination. Where then would be the steeps of life⁷? If war had ever stopped, we should have to re-invent it, on this view, to redeem life from flat degeneration.

The idea of a paradise for peaceful, passive, stupid people, in which "social evolution" has caused the end of war, "revolts...our higher imagination," according to the "militarily-patriotic and the romantic-minded" people. They think that ending war will mean that we will no longer have the high points of life, which can only be reached by great effort.

Comment [WU21]: How to cope with paragraph after paragraph of unfamiliar examples?

Comment [WU22]: He goes on and on, adding one example after another, and it's really hard to continue to pay attention. He has gathered and is presenting these examples so he'll convince his audience that he's correct about past wars, because he's presenting a position that they may not be convinced of, or may not have thought about. For us, though, it seems like too much.

Comment [WU23]: How do you deal with it? It's mostly a matter of persistence: Tough it out until he starts to discuss his point again. And remember that you don't have to understand or remember everything.

Comment [WU24]: How to use writing to help you to understand a difficult passage.

Comment [WU25]: What is that? It is a situation in which "war may be a transitory phenomenon in social evolution."

Comment [WU26]: Who are they? They are "The militarily-patriotic and the romantic minded everywhere, and especially the professional military class."

Comment [WU27]: 1. Write out or copy and paste a difficult passage. 2. By referring to the surrounding text in the source essay, figure out the vague references. 3. Figure out the meaning of unclear words or phrases, using common sense, a dictionary or a research tool like Google, or your teacher (still your best research tool).

Comment [WU28]: 4. Rewrite the passage so it makes sense to you. This is a paraphrase, and to do it properly you need to put the phrases you take directly from James in quotation marks.

⁴ Jingoism – Extreme nationalism, usually characterized by a belligerent foreign policy.

⁵ Peloponnesian War - A long war between the Greek city-states of Athens and Sparta

⁶ Hitherto - until now

⁷ the steeps of life – the most difficult or "steepest" parts of life. James is being poetic here, and may not realize he's plagiarizing from a hymn written in 1896, "Climb the steeps of life, my brother" by Marian Froelich.