Helping our Struggling Students Read Critically

THE CHALLENGE
“[H]igh schools typically teach students to read receptively, to read for information. Many students have not been taught to read actively or critically, to construct knowledge as they read.”

Bosley 2008: 286
Over 90% of our students say

- Reading a text book is a self-identified challenged
- Process like reading a novel
- Process Result:
  - Reading
  - Re-Reading
  - Giving up
“Many have not learned to approach texts with a questioning stance that probes for underlying assumptions or intentions. Students often read at surface level; if they do not „get it“ they give up rather than engage in the difficulty of the task.”
Bosley 2008: 286
“Many college instructors assume that high school graduates can „read,“ but much research suggests that, for some students, critical reading strategies must be taught explicitly, and must be reinforced through practice.”
Bosley 2008: 286
College Textbooks are built differently

- **Active Critical Reading**
  - Reading something with a determination to understand and evaluate it for its relevance to your needs
  - They hear this, know they need it, but it seems like an illusive mythical beast to many
They need to remember they knew how

- Pore over cover & pictures
- Make guesses and predictions
- Ask questions
- Read to find answers not to be hit by words
What issues particularly challenge your students as readers in your disciplinary field?
Engage the Reading Process to Address Their Struggles

Before Reading
- Understanding the assignment
- Organizing their approach to reading (and studying)
- Connecting with the content of the text

While Reading
- Decoding and/or interpreting the text (vocabulary, main ideas)

After Reading
- Organizing information into a useful tool
- Using memory strategies
The Grab Bag

- 20% of what we hear
- 30% of what we see
- 50% of what we see and hear
- 70% of what we discuss with others
- 80% of what we experience personally
- 95% of what we teach to someone else
Idea 1: Pick a brief sample for in-class

- Small group work already encourages versatility.
- Use these to demonstrate the kinds of questions they themselves ask when they analyze such a text or object.
- Direct questions to help students begin to articulate what’s curious to them in the passage or object.
- Guide this discussion in the direction of some important tips that they have thought through beforehand.
- Put in a handout, which the students can refer to in their first independent reading or analysis assignment.
- Return to these tips in class and expand on them throughout the semester.
We have several vague ways of describing what students need to do with a piece of writing.

“Read actively, take a questioning stance, probe for underlying assumptions, engage its complexity.”

While these work as guiding lights for some students, others need more concrete direction.
Suggest activities such as the following:

- Mark the text: Use pencils and pens (highlighters tend to lead to purposeless and inarticulate recollections).
- Make notes: Use post-its, notebooks, or computers to record questions and thoughts as you read.
- Look up unfamiliar words and write synonyms for them in your text.
- Write down key words, metaphors, and concepts.
- Write a paragraph summary of the contents after you read a piece.
- Write down what the text seems to want to achieve, and list strategies used in the text to achieve its goals.
- Step back: How well does the text succeed, in the reader’s opinion? Locate evidence and explain your rationale.
Different Strokes: Different Folks

Some students get their best insights when writing and reading, others when talking and listening, others when drawing diagrams: encourage all!
Help Develop a Reading Process Plan

- Before/During/After
- Additional Handouts: Text Coding, Annotating, Cornell Notes, Vocabulary in Context, Fix-up Strategies, SQ3R, THIEVES, PRO
SQ3R

- **SKIM** through the text quickly to get an overall impression.

- **QUESTION.** If you are reading it for a particular purpose (for example, to answer an assignment), ask yourself how it helps. Also ask questions of the text: Who? What? Where? When? How?

- **READ.** Read the text in a focused, and fairly speedy way.
A Recursive Process

- foster among students the recognition that the process of critical reading takes time and practice – and give them concrete activities
- inculcate patience for revisiting steps, getting more information, revising ideas
- remind students that class discussions and homework assignments are places to work out the quality and depth of their reading, both collaboratively and individually
Online Resources

FCC homepage > Library > Research Guides > Student Help & Support > Study Skills > Reading

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