



Teach Critical Reading Skills to Help Students Improve Writing

Take a few minutes in class to teach students how to read scholarly material in your discipline.

Have Students Read and then Write to Understand: Do not Simply Assign Scholarly Articles to Read

“Students sometimes don’t buy the class books. Professors are shocked. . . . a student told me that she regarded all assigned reading as ‘recommended,’ even when professors labeled it ‘required’” (Blum, 2016).

“Reading, writing, thinking, reasoning, and doing within each discipline is unique . . . every field of study creates, communicates, and evaluates knowledge differently” (Lent, 2018).

Therefore, “Teachers need to help students understand how knowledge is arrived at in their own disciplines, what counts as evidence, and how to read critically and evaluate knowledge claims” (Lindemann, 2001).

Current students do not have adequate critical reading skills. SAT scores have slid since the mid-2000s, especially in writing and critical reading (a 13-point decline in each) (Twenge, 2017). As a result, they often do not understand what they read for their classes. Instructors in the disciplines should teach students how to read. Teaching reading skills for your discipline can empower students to more fully understand assigned reading.

Offer Simple Steps for Reading in Your Discipline

1. Identify main idea of each paragraph
2. Annotate (use the margins to write connections, ask questions, etc.)
3. Look up unfamiliar vocabulary
4. Summarize portions of the article
5. “Argue” with the text
6. Make connections with the text
7. Keep reading – even when it is difficult

(readwriteteach.org/2013/03/12/what-is-college-level-reading/)

How Can Instructors Help?

- **Preview Reading Assignments:** Explain the purpose and value of the readings
- **Advise students to use highlighting sparingly, if at all:** “The yellow marks in my college textbooks, which left little of the page in its original color, did not help me to learn very much” (Porter-O’Donnell, 2004).
- **Consider reducing the number of required sources** and add some quick in-class activities to deepen student engagement with the reading assignments.
- **Encourage students to ask questions** at every stage of the reading: *Why? What happened? How? What is the difference? Who? Etc.*

Teach Reading in Your Discipline

Since we want students to think about *what* and *how* they are reading, “teachers must move from transmitting information to showing students how to engage in the literacies that make up their discipline” (pp. 4-5). Do not just show students how to read but also how to critique what they are reading; do not just expect students to find evidence but teach what to do with the evidence and how to use knowledge in meaningful and relevant ways (pp. 5-6).

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