



Preparing Students to Communicate in Our Scholarly Disciplines

Students need to learn that critical reading is the means to *create* meaning –
not simply *find* it!

Help Students Enter the “Discourse” Community of Your Discipline

Disciplinary or Academic Discourse “refers to the ways of thinking and using language that exist inside an established academic community, either in higher education in general or in particular disciplinary communities; [it] represents consistent and standardized practices determined by the community members” (Morgan, 2018, p. 16).

“Many students have no concept that such an entity as academic discourse even exists,” but their teachers may expect them to write in the language of the academy” (Elbow, 1991, as cited in Morgan, 2018, pp. 17-18). Elbow further asserts that “even though teachers require the disciplinary language, they do not teach it” (p. 18).

Students Need to be Taught to Read Critically Within Our Disciplines

Students may have difficulty learning and implementing the communication style of our discipline; they may also be enrolled in other courses that require them “to move between two [or more] separate communities with strikingly different ways of communicating and making sense of the world.” Students may “have no concept of how to successfully make the transition” (Morgan, 2018, p. 27).

Do we assume that students will be able to read and incorporate the ideas from the sources they find?

In fact, research studies, such as The Citation Project, show that students have shallow patterns of the way they use sources. Students may find a quote that seems to relate, even though they may not read the article, and then insert it into the paper. Or they may include “paraphrases, without comment . . . into a description of what [they] found . . . stringing the various authors' ideas together in a piecemeal fashion” (Jamieson, 2013, p. 6) with little or no understanding of the actual articles.

Teach students how to research and read in our discipline. Students should do in-depth reading on a topic and problem, which is “necessary for successful writing” and provides the “necessary subject matter expertise. This states the obvious: if you don’t have some depth of understanding of the subject you’re writing about, your writing will be vague, unclear, insignificant” (Beaufort, 2012, para 15).

Learning to read critically should accompany student learning of “the vocabulary, concepts, and context of the discipline” (Horning, 2011, as cited in Jamieson, 2013, p. 8).

How Does Critical Reading Help Students With Their Writing?

“Developing students’ writing skills requires developing their reading skills” (Carillo, 2016, p. 1).

Students entering into our disciplines may not be able to "see the text as part of an on-going conversation about key issues or ideas in a discipline" (Horning, 2011, as cited in Jamieson, 2013, p. 7). Help students to question what they read, rather than merely accepting all things in print as “Gospel truth.” We can help students move past binary thinking, “which is a type of thinking wherein you believe that there are only two sides to every issue” (Carillo, 2017, p. 44). [This is a common belief for less mature students.]

When students understand how to critically read scholarly sources, they can confidently incorporate the elements of the conversation in your discipline on their topic:

- respond to what others have said about their topic
- state the value of their work and announce the plan for their papers
- acknowledge that others might disagree with the position they have taken
- adopt a voice of authority
- use academic and discipline-specific vocabulary
- emphasize evidence, often in tables, graphs, and images”

(Thonney, 2011, as cited in Morgan, 2018, p. 116)

Faculty can “draw students into wider professional, and academic communities . . . if students are not taught the skills of creating new statements through evaluating, assimilating, and responding” to claims made by others, “we offer them the meager choice of being parrots of authority” (Carillo, 2017, p. 63) rather than contributors to the scholarly conversation.

References

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