

Strategies to Help Students Respond to Academic Texts

A. Review readings with students through discussion or reading guides

1. Identify the purpose of the reading
 - Tell a story?
 - Give an overview of a problem or phenomenon?
 - Try to achieve certain practical results?
 - Lay out a broad theory that applies to some phenomenon?
 - Spell out a position without arguing it?
 - Argue for or against a particular position as thoroughly as possible?
 - Give some reasons for a position?
 - Examine certain difficulties or advantages in a position without giving a definitive view?
2. Help students understand key concepts in the readings:
 - Identify technical vocabulary
 - Discuss prior knowledge that the reading depends on – work in your course, in the discipline, or “common” knowledge.
 - Help students identify the thesis
3. Review the structure of the article
4. Have students examine and analyze the title of the piece.

B. Discuss process and purpose

- Discuss with students how your own reading process varies with your purpose.
- Discuss with students the purpose for reading a particular text: what should they focus on and what might not be relevant to this purpose.

C. Experiment with different note-taking strategies. Preview some of these in class.

- “What it says” and “what it does” statements (summary of paragraph and purpose of paragraph). This ensures careful reading and increased awareness of structure.
- Before and after statements . “Before I read this text, the author assumed I believed ...” “After I read this text the author wanted me to believe ...” “The author was/was not successful in changing my view because ...”
- Marginal notes / annotations: summary, questions, protests, connections, structural commentary.
- Story-boards – notes on the flow of text.

D. Experiment with having students write regularly about the readings.

- Reading logs.
- Double / Triple entry notebooks.
- Guided journal questions that get students to focus on important points.
- Summaries or responses written as letters from students to you.
- Log entries that use sentence starters to support understanding.

**E. Try a close reading of important lines or passages (chosed by you or the students).
Do this as a whole class or in small groups.**

1. Ask students to select a line or passage:

- That they think is central or significant to understanding the reading.
- That resonates for them by connecting to their own experiences or other works they have read.
- That confuses them. Ask them to write about what they think it means, or raise questions about it.
- That they strongly agree / disagree with and jot down the reasons for their opinion.
- In which the author's use of language has a particular effect on them or contributes in some way to the meaning of the text.
- That incorporates a fact or statistic that surprises them. Ask them to jot down the reason for their reaction.
- And then translate it into their own words.