

Effective Reading Strategies

What is active reading?

Many students are inexperienced readers, overwhelmed by the density of college textbooks, baffled by the complexity of primary sources and their unfamiliarity with academic discourse. Active reading simply means reading something with a determination to understand and evaluate it for its relevance to your needs.

What are the causes of students' reading difficulties?

While most students have basic literacy, college students need to be taught to read powerfully. Students need to become 'deep readers' who focus on meaning as opposed to 'surface readers' who focus on facts and information.

- School culture rewards surface reading with stress on memorization of facts and information.
- Resistance to substantial time-on-task required for deep reading.
- Misunderstanding of the reading process as requiring expertise.
- Lectures over reading material undermine students reading practice.
- Inadequate variation in reading process according to purpose—not every text requires deep reading!
- Adjusting reading strategy to each genre takes considerable practice and knowledge of its discursive field.
- Ant's-eye view vs bird's-eye view of text?
- Difficulty recognizing the rhetorical context of the text—why did the author put pen to paper?
- A conversation with the author or an inert text?
- Difficulties with unfamiliar points of view.
- Cultural codes, vocabulary and syntax.

Reading skills, like writing skills, develop slowly over time... we can help create learning environments that nurture reading growth.

- Explain why a text is difficult—its intended audience, discursive genre and rhetorical functions.
- Explain variations in your own reading process.
- Explaining structural function by 'what it says' and 'what it does' statements for paragraphs.

Assignment 1: Write what it says and what it does statements for the first five paragraphs of 'My Father's Black Pride.'

- What is the author's frame of reference?
- What are the cultural codes of the text?
- What is the message of the text?
- Reading as a 'Believing and Doubting game!'

Assignment 2: Read the first five paragraphs of the 'Walden' excerpt and anticipate the writer's frame of reference, presumed cultural codes and message. What are your initial views regarding the message?

Some effective reading strategies

1. Marginal notes
2. Reading Logs
3. Exploratory Writing
4. Summaries
5. Double-entry/ Summary-response
6. Imagined Interview
7. Graphic Organizers
8. Writing 'Translations'

Assignment 3: For 'My Father's Black Pride' choose any one of the following three reading strategies and teach what you have learned to all of us!

- a) outline, flowchart or diagram to map and understand ideas visually;
- b) write a summary in your own words
- c) write an exam question based on the reading

Assignment 4: For the 'Walden' excerpt:

- a) read the paragraphs with 'what it says' and 'what it does' notes along the margins;
- b) without looking at your notes recall and mentally visualize the contents and write key messages of the reading
- c) play the 'believing and doubting game' with the messages you noted and ask two believing and doubting questions based on this;
- d) review your notes and questions and share a brief summary with your view of the reading with all of us!

References:

Bean, John. 2011. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing Critical Thinking and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

The McGraw Center: www.princeton.edu/mcgraw

Academic Skills Center: <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/reading.html>