Lehman College
Writing Across the Curriculum

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 (chose 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 my 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.