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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to explain each of the three phases of reading textbooks and to provide strategies for aiding students to better understand and connect to their textbooks in each of these phases. Each of the three phases is named for its writing counterpart: planning, drafting, and evaluating. This article also states that three types of awareness are necessary for students to do well: task awareness, strategy awareness, and performance awareness. This presentation utilizes strategies taken from the author's textbook, "Making Connections: Reading and Understanding College Textbooks," which teaches students not only to read for facts and to pass a test but also to apply the facts to their own lives. The first phase in the reading process is the planning phase, which involves previewing and predicting, accessing prior knowledge, and creating a purpose. Phase two of the reading process is the drafting stage, where active reading, requiring metacognition, is the key to success. Finally, the third phase of the reading process is the responding or evaluating phase, in which students need to react and relate to what they have read, and thus are aware of what they know and what they still need to know. (VWC)

Helping Students Make Connections to Textbooks

Sheila Allen

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Abstract
This article is the result of a presentation done at the NISOD Conference in Austin, Texas in May 1999. The author presented strategies for content-area instructors to use with discipline textbooks. These strategies are divided into three categories: pre-reading strategies, during-reading strategies, and post-reading strategies. All of the ideas are taken from the author's textbook *Making Connections: Reading and Understanding College Textbooks*, for use in developmental-college reading courses.

Helping Students Make Connections to Textbooks

Reading a textbook is a very different task from reading a novel or a magazine. Students need to be aware that, just as in writing, there is a process to reading a textbook, and this process involves recursive steps that aid the reader in comprehending and retaining important material. The purpose of this presentation is to explain each of the three phases of reading textbooks and to provide strategies for aiding students to better understand and connect to their textbook in each of the phases. Each of the three phases is named for its writing counterpart: planning, drafting, and evaluating. El-Hindi (1997) used these phases in her research to show how the integration of reading and writing along with metacognitive instruction helps pre -college freshmen improve both reading and writing skills. Wade and Reynolds (1989) researched the problems that high school and college students have in courses connected to reading textbooks. They found that students do not monitor their comprehension, students are not adept at predicting whether they can remember specific information, and students lack a global awareness of test readiness. Three types of awareness are necessary for students to do well: task awareness, strategy awareness and performance awareness. Knowing the reading process and being aware of the task, the strategies, and individual performance in each of the steps will help students to be better readers as well as perform better on tests. In her

textbook *Making Connections: Reading and Understanding College Textbooks*, Allen (1998) provides a number of strategies to help students not only comprehend textbook material but want to continue to read and gather information that is both helpful and interesting. Students learn not only to read for facts and to pass a test but also to apply the facts to their own lives. It is from that textbook that the strategies in this presentation were taken.

The first phase in the reading process is the planning phase. This involves three activities: previewing and predicting, accessing prior knowledge, and creating a purpose. The first activities, previewing and predicting, can be completed at different times in the reading process. On a broad scale, students should preview a textbook when they first acquire it. This would include reading any cover information, introductory material, preface, and notes to the student as well as checking for a glossary, index, appendices, and references. It would also include a review of the table of contents to help students get an idea of the "big picture." As each chapter is read, students should look for any aids authors have provided to help make the textbook reading easier. Students should look for and read chapter outlines, goals, objectives, questions (at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the chapter), as well as summaries and reviews. Students should also review headings and subheadings to determine relationships between and among topics in the chapter as well as those in previous chapters. Illustrations and graphics in the chapter should be read as well as captions and any new terms with their definitions. As students preview, they should be thinking about what the author will write; what is it they know about the particular topic, what do they want to know, and why do they want to read the material? This leads to the second activity, accessing prior knowledge.

When students begin to read about a topic, they should first take some time to think about what they already know about the topic. This begins to set up hooks in their brains so that as they read, new information can be "hooked" onto this prior knowledge. The less information a student has about a particular topic, the more work needs to be done at this planning stage. Instructors can assist by lecturing to provide this prior knowledge or by having a class discussion so that students can share what they already know about the topic. Another method instructors may use is to assign related articles to help students build prior knowledge and then to have them write about that topic either in a two-part journal that requires personal response to a particular section or in a summary of an article. Follow-up can then be done with discussion.

The final activity in the planning stage is to create a purpose for reading. This may come from the instructor but it is better to have students determine their own purpose for reading. One method is to use textbook questions found at the end of a chapter or chapter objectives found either at the beginning or end of a chapter. Students may use these to help them create a purpose for reading. For example, they may decide that their purpose is to find the answers to the review questions or to complete each of the objectives. Use of the aids that an author provides can help students find their own purpose for reading rather than their reading for the instructor. Students must be taught how to identify and use these aids.

Phase two of the reading process is the drafting stage. During this stage, actual reading is being done. Active reading, requiring metacognition, is the key to a successful stage two. Students must be aware of what they are thinking as they read and learn to focus and refocus their thoughts to their purpose for reading. Using textbook questions,

student-generated questions, and questions created from subheadings will help students focus. Constant monitoring of what is being read, of what is important and not important, and what needs to be remembered must occur. In a study completed by Davey (1983) students with high scores on a reading comprehension test were asked to read and relate what they were thinking as they read. An analysis of this process showed that good readers have certain metacognitive skills. First, they make predictions; they think about what it is that they will be reading based on what is currently being read. Second, good readers visualize what they are reading; they form pictures in their minds so that they can "see" the concepts. Third, they make analogies to what they already know. They relate what they read to something they have already read or to something personal. For example, when reading a psychology text on personality, students may make an analogy to a different theory of personality or they make an analogy to the personality of a friend. Fourth, good readers verbalize confusing points. They are aware when something does not make sense or they don't understand. And fifth, these readers verbalize fix-up strategies to correct those confusing points. Strategies may include to continue to read and search for a specific meaning, to reread, or even to ask someone for assistance. Students must also learn to think on the different levels of thinking as defined by Bloom's taxonomy: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Instructors can assist students with this by requiring them to create questions on the different levels and requiring them to answer those questions. One fun activity is to initiate this process by requiring students to write questions on the different levels of thinking for a well-known fairy tale. For example, have students write one question on each level of thinking for "Little Red Riding Hood."

Knowledge – Who was Red going to visit?

Comprehension – Tell what happened to Red after she got to grandmother's house.

Application – Explain why Red should not have spoken to the wolf.

Synthesis – Create a new ending for the fairy tale.

Evaluation – Red wanted to get to her sick grandmother quickly. Should she have gone through the woods to save time?

Finally, the third phase of the reading process is the responding or evaluating phase. During this phase students need to react and relate to what they have read. They need to be aware of what they know and what they still need to know. Activities include having students predict test questions, take practice tests and discuss answers, and work in groups to discuss reasons for answers. If a study guide for a textbook exists, instructors should make students aware of this guide. Instructors may also require writing on the topic to help students determine what they do and do not know. One-minute summaries can be written at the conclusion of a class to have students quickly and concisely write main ideas. Learning logs can be required so that students keep track of what they have learned and how they have learned it. For example, students can be required to write how long it took to read a particular chapter, how it was read, what type of notes were taken as well as the important main ideas they learned.

Reading a textbook is not a skill that comes naturally. It requires that students be aware of what they need to know and how they should go about learning the material, as well as remaining aware of how well they are accomplishing these tasks. These skills should be taught to students and practiced with them. In this manner, students will

become better independent readers as they progress through school and through their careers.

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