

Reading to Learn

Effective reading skills are critical to every student's success. Engaged readers are active learners who interact with a text ready to annotate and make connections, striving not merely for comprehension but to unlock meaning and function. When students are able to analyze and synthesize assigned reading material, they are better prepared to learn class content, which often builds on what they read, and are more likely to **listen actively**, **participate** in class discussion, and ask questions.

While writing is often taught throughout a student's academic career, reading tends to be considered a "finished skill" by the time a student advances to high school. As a result, many students begin college underprepared to engage deeply with the demanding texts necessary for college-level learning across disciplines. Without guidance from instructors on reading for specific disciplines and in specific contexts, students are more likely to read quickly and superficially.

Some ways to promote a Reading to Learn mindset:

- Serve as a model reader: Explain how you, as an expert in your field, read genres differently. Show students your own notation techniques. Explain how you determine when it's okay to skim and when more careful reading is required.
- Encourage critical reading by emphasizing that authors often write to change a reader's point of view.

Some ways to apply Reading to Learn principles to low-stakes assignments:

- Explain that deep reading involves both grasping content and understanding purpose. In class, ask students to break down passages of text by writing both summary and function statements.
- In class, ask students to "translate" particularly difficult sentences into their own words.
- Use reading compliance quizzes to encourage response and analysis, rather than absorption of facts.
- Ask students to keep reading logs to summarize, analyze, or relate a text to their personal experience. Reading logs may also be used to critique or argue with texts.
- Require marginal notes geared toward synthesis and/or immediate responses to moments in a text.
- Consider that some students might prefer to use a graphic organizer, like a flowchart, for note-taking.

References

Bean, John. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Odom, Mary Lou. "Not Just for Writing Anymore: What WAC Can Teach Us About Reading to Learn." *Across the Disciplines: A Journal of Language, Learning, and Academic Writing*, vol. 10, 2013.

See also

Active Listening

Fostering Participation

High-stakes and Low-stakes Assignments