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 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.