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 and connects 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.