

Strategy: Engaging Students in Critical Reading, Writing, and Speaking

Six types of prompts guide pre-class reading that asks students to (1) identify the problem or issue, (2) make connections, (3) interpret the evidence, (4) challenge assumptions, (5) make applications, and (6) take a different point-of-view.

Origin

Tomasek, T. (2009). Critical reading: Using reading prompts to promote active engagement with text. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 21(1), 127-132.

Application

Critical reading/writing/speaking prompts can be designed to target specific critical thinking skills and can be used in and out of class, alone or in combination, to help students expand, clarify, or modify ideas.

Identify the problem/issue helps students create a “need to know” viewpoint:

- What problem is the author identifying? Who does the problem relate to?
- What are the complexities of this issue?
- For whom is this topic important and why?

Making connections helps students think about course topics within the realm of their own experience:

- What do I already know about this topic? Where and how have I acquired this knowledge? What might be the limitations of my thinking about this topic?
- How is this different from what I already know? Why might this difference exist?
- What new ideas are here for me to consider? Why am I willing to consider them? Why am I not willing to consider them?
- What experiences have I had that support, confound, or refute this information?
- What information contributes to my interests?
- How do these principles relate to what I’m learning in my other courses?
- What connections can I make between this and something else we’ve covered in this course?
- Make a list of ideas presented that are similar to your own and a separate list of ideas presented that you have never thought about before.

Interpretation of evidence can help students in reading case studies, viewing video clips, or reviewing information:

- What inferences can I make from the evidence provided?
- What patterns do I notice?
- What relevant evidence or examples does the author give to support his or her justification? Am I convinced? Why or why not?
- How does the author challenge complexities of this idea/information?

Challenging assumptions helps students identify and critique seldom-tested assumptions, determine their source, and evaluate their validity based on information:

- What assumptions do I have about this topic? How have my assumptions shaped my initial point of view? What information opposes my assumptions?
- What do I still not know or understand about the topic?

- In what areas has this reading helped me identify a needed change?
- What kinds of assumptions is the author making? Do I share these assumptions?
- What does the author appear to value? Have I been convinced to value these same things? Why or why not?
- What information builds my confidence in the authors' expertise?
- If the opportunity arose, what questions would I pose to the author?
- How does my frame of reference affect my understanding of this information?
- Write an autobiography about learning this information. What emotions, feelings, and/or assumptions related to learning do you have?

Making application helps students use what they have learned in practical ways:

- What advice could I give to someone using this information? On what basis?
- 3-2-1. What are the three most important concepts? What two pieces of information would you share with a colleague? What is one way this information has changed you/your point of view?
- How did this help you build your professional knowledge?
- In what ways did this information help you pay attention to something different in your environment?
- Looking back over what you've learned, what pieces of information make the most sense to you?
- Looking ahead to where you will be in two years, what pieces of information make the most sense to you?

Taking a different point of view helps students consider diverse ideas:

- Write an explanation of this topic for someone else.
- What would you point out as important about this topic to others who either question or disagree with this point of view?

Reflection

- How does this compare to what you are already doing?
- Identify content in your course for which students need to be able to:
 - Identify problems or issues
 - Make connections
 - Interpret evidence
 - Question assumptions
 - Make applications
 - Consider different points of view
- How will you use these prompts in your course?