

## Center for Instructional Development and Research

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Information for People who Teach  
at the University of Washington

## Helping Students Read Well

*"Many of today's students are poor readers, overwhelmed by the density of their college textbooks and baffled by the strangeness and complexity of primary sources and by their unfamiliarity with academic discourse ... armed with a yellow highlighter but with no apparent strategy for using it and hampered by a lack of knowledge of how skilled readers actually go about reading."*

*(Bean, Engaging Ideas, 1996)*

*"... a goodly part of higher education is education in how to read – how to read a poem, how to read social science, how to read legal briefs, how to read the literature of our culture and our professions."*

*(McKeachie, Teaching Tips, 1999, emphasis added)*

*This issue of the Bulletin identifies strategies to help promote students' education in how to read.*

### **DISCUSS YOUR PURPOSE(S) FOR ASSIGNING THE READING.**

How does a given reading assignment help students achieve the goals for the course?

- Preview the reading with students to identify key issues or questions they should be alert to as they read.
- Show students how the reading fits into the course: other readings, key concepts, future assignments.
- Use brief quizzes or in-class surveys to see how well students are linking the reading to course goals.

### **HELP STUDENTS LEARN TO READ A VARIETY OF KINDS OF TEXTS CHARACTERISTIC OF THE DISCIPLINE.**

How do you approach the different types of reading that you encounter?

- Demonstrate different purposes and strategies suitable for different kinds of texts.
- Tell students what you think must be studied in detail and what can be read for general background information.

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## HELP STUDENTS CONNECT WITH THE NEW AND UNFAMILIAR.

How can material from the readings be integrated with students' prior knowledge and with other course material?

- Provide background information.
- Design study questions that will point students to key ideas, applications, and connections to important issues. Use on-line or in-class discussions to follow up on reading questions.
- Ask questions about the text that require students to reflect on their experience and prior knowledge.

## GIVE STUDENTS GUIDANCE IN WORKING WITH THE TEXT.

How do you manage large amounts of reading and prioritize as you study?

- Encourage students to ask themselves questions as they move through the text. Model this process for them in class or provide model questions initially.
- Show them textual clues to meaning and significance of the material that is presented in the text.
- Discuss in class the important issues raised by the reading, and ask students how they recognized those issues as they read.

## HELP STUDENTS INTERPRET READINGS IN THEIR OWN WORDS.

How can students organize and assess their own understanding of what they read?

- Assign students note-taking or summarizing tasks as homework during the first few weeks of the course, and check their work to see how well they understand.
- Give students model notes you have taken on a chapter, showing your questions, comments, quick summaries of difficult concepts, criticisms, links to other parts of the text, effective use of highlighting. Encourage students to do the same for each other.

See <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/readingtools.html> for web sites that give students reading strategies.

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## HOW CAN CIDR HELP?

At CIDR we can help you tailor these strategies and adapt them to your specific teaching situation. We can also help you as you design and assess your course, develop assignments, plan class activities, and assess student learning in your course. Call or email to arrange an appointment with a CIDR consultant.



## Center for Instructional Development and Research

CIDR promotes excellence in teaching and learning at the University of Washington through its work with individual faculty and TAs, departments, campus-wide initiatives, and University leaders. CIDR staff are available year-round to collaborate on the design, implementation, and assessment of ways to advance teaching and learning for all students in the diverse UW community. Consultations are confidential and offered at no charge to UW faculty, TAs, and departments.

If you have questions about teaching and learning, or you would like to find out more about working with CIDR, you can call us at 543-6588, send a message to [cidr@u.washington.edu](mailto:cidr@u.washington.edu), or visit our web site:

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