

## Strategies to Encourage Active, Critical Reading

### Direct Instruction on “How to Get the Most from Assigned Readings”

Demonstrate how active readers would read a section of the assignment by showing where students might pause to think or take notes. Suggest what those notes might be – a question, a summary, or a reaction. Students complete the reading assignment using similar techniques and bring books to class marked up, notes taken, written summaries, and questions listed. Students compare their notes in small groups while the professor observes.



**One Sentence Plus Three Pieces of Evidence:** Pose an open-ended question (i.e., “In Washington Irving’s *Rip Van Winkle*, is Rip or his wife responsible for the quality of their marital relationship?”) Students answer the question in 1 sentence, and include 3 quotes from the text to support their answers. **Variations:** Students state an opinion about an issue/policy and quote 3 statistics to support (or contradict) their opinion. In **Philosophy:** “In one sentence identify the type of ethical reasoning the author uses and quote 3 passages that reveal this type of ethical reasoning.” In **Art History:** “Write 1 interpretive sentence about a painting and list 3 features of the painting that contribute to that interpretation.”

### The Rhetorical Précis Format

- a) In a single coherent sentence, give the following:
  - name of the author, title of the work, date in parenthesis
  - a rhetorically accurate verb (assert, argue, deny, refute, prove, disprove, explain, etc.);
  - a **that** clause containing the major claim (thesis statement) of the work.
- b) In a single coherent sentence, give an explanation of how the author develops and supports the major claim (thesis statement).
- c) In a single coherent sentence, give a statement of the author’s purpose, followed by an “in order” phrase.
- d) In a single coherent sentence, give a description of the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience.

### Create a Learning Guide Using Guided Question about the Reading

- What is the main idea of ...?” or “Summarize the main idea of...”
- “What is a new example of...?” or “What if...?”
- “Explain how....” Or “Explain why....”
- “What are the similarities or differences between ... and ...?”

**Writing-to-Learn Activities** encourage closer attention and deeper learning from texts. For example, “Choose a Math or Chemistry problem & write step-by-step instructions for solving this type of problem.” Variation: “Select a problem for which you are not absolutely certain your solution is correct. Write about your questions. What are you not sure about and why?”

**What It Says and What It Does Statements:** John Bean suggests asking students to write *what it says* and *what it does* statements for each paragraph or section of the reading. A *What It Says* statement summarizes the content of the paragraph or section. A *What It Does* statement describes the purpose or function – that is, it poses an issue, states the main point, provides evidence pro and con, gives an example of something.

**Microthemes:** Students formulate a 200-300 word response to questions on readings.

- *A summary-writing microtheme:* Write accurate, balanced account of the main ideas.
- *A thesis-supported microtheme:* State a position and support it with evidence. Explicitly state the relationship between the thesis and the evidence.
- *A data-provided microtheme:* Present data and students draw conclusions.
- Present a problem or task and have students *explain their solution in nontechnical language.* For example, explain a physics problem writing in “Dear Abby” style.

### **Prompts to create a range of critical-thinking responses.**

- **Identification of problem or issue and connections** —
  - What problem is the author identifying? Who does the problem relate to?
  - For whom is this topic important and why?
  - How does this relate to the concept of ??? we studied last week?
- **Interpretation of evidence**—i.e. in a case study or video clip.
  - What inferences can I make from the evidence given in the reading sample?
  - What relevant evidence or examples does the author give to support his or her justification?
- **Challenging assumptions**—
  - What kind of assumptions is the author making? Do I share these assumptions?
  - What information builds my confidence in the author’s expertise?
- **Making application**—students use what they have learned
  - What advice could I add to this reading selection? On what basis do I give this advice?
  - What would I point out as important about this topic to others who either question or disagree with my point of view?

### **Resources**

1. Bean, J. (2011) *Engaging Ideas*
2. Bean, J., Drenk, D., and Lee, F. D. (1982). Microtheme strategies for developing cognitive skills; *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, Issue 12, pages 27–38, December 1982
3. Connolly, P., and Vilardi, T. (1989). *Writing to learn mathematics and science*. NY: Teachers College Press.
4. Erickson, B.L., Peters, C.B., Strommer, D.W. (1991) *Teaching First-Year College Students*,
5. Peirce, William. (2003). *Teaching Critical Reading*.
6. <http://academic.pg.cc.md.us/~wpeirce/MCCCTR/readin~1.html>
7. [http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/modules/rhetorical-precis/sample/peirce\\_sample\\_precis\\_click.html](http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/modules/rhetorical-precis/sample/peirce_sample_precis_click.html)
8. 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.