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ENGL 101

Some general assumptions about reading that you may want to encourage:

1. READING IS A PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING

We come to understand a text through an active investigation of the text. Frequently our reading comprehension is made up of three things we do to texts:

* **Good readers control the literal** meaning of a text; that means we can summarize (in a fiction piece) where it takes place, what has happened and who the main characters are. In a Non Fiction piece, we need to be able to identify the topics that are addressed, what the author has to say about those topics and be able to paraphrase or summarize the key points the writer is using to send the message of the essay. In either case, a good reader needs to be able to summarize the gist of the story or the argument the writer is making.
* **Good readers then interpret** what we have read, trying to express what we think the text means, what significance it has in relation to our reading purposes. What is so important about what the author has to say, or what are some of the implications of the writer's treatment of topics in the writing? (In all writing the writer has something to say about a range of topics). Interpretation is primarily about determining the significance of a text in relation to the reader’s purposes.
* Once we have a clear sense of what is being said and why we think the writer needed to say it, **good readers can evaluate** what the writer wrote, evaluate his or her vision of the world or explanation of an issue, etc. We make use of the experience of reading by giving value to it, usually in as a well-informed opinion.

Because beginning readers often don't think of reading as a process of active engagement with the text, they often try to do too much too soon, that is, reach conclusions about a text or begin to discuss the merits of a text before they are prepared to do so. This can be very frustrating for a student writer who has to generate a reading on her own. By taking a process approach to reading, readers can identify different stages of comprehension as they lead to the construction of meaning, to comprehension.

2. NO READING IS EVER COMPLETE

Often rereading a text will allow a reader to find new meanings or missed significance. Because, as readers, we often occupy a different mental space or have a different set of purposes, each time we read, different readings may lead to different interpretations and evaluations. Good readers are open to this kind of flexibility, but they continue to pay attention to the details of the text as they better manage the literal meaning of the text. Finally, many readers believe that once they have read a text they have experienced its totality of meaning. That belief closes off discussion, and removes the reader from further thinking about the significance of ideas in a text, ideas that may provide deeper, more complex, or more useful insights relative to the reader’s purposes for reading.

3. ALL READING BEGINS IN CONFUSION

Even the best readers don't "get it all" on a first or second read. Reading is a process whereby the reader moves toward understanding. Reading is a process of meaning-making, not a skill that opens a text to immediate comprehension. Reading as a process of meaning-making is often developed in conjunction with other people reading the same material and discussing how they reached an interpretation of the text. Reading comprehension is helped a great deal when readers read for specific purposes, write to themselves about what they have read, and then discuss that reading with others. No meaning is simply self-present in a text; you have to make the reading, it has to be developed in conjunction with the cues the writer provides, the situation in which you are reading, and the knowledge you bring to the text. None of those elements are fully present to readers at the start of a reading.

4. MEANING DOES NOT OCCUR IN A VACUUM

All reading is bound by a specific context for reading. Every reader brings something of their own experience to a reading; and private, non-academic experience matters. The best readers understand the intellectual or experiential positions from which they read, In simple terms that means that they know they are reading a certain piece as a biology student who has not much interest in biology but needs to pass the class, even though they have had some fun in the past looking at rivers and wondering what all was going on there. Or someone may read from the position of person who has experienced a lot of poverty in his life. Or someone may read from the position of a person who really wants to understand how writing works, and so on. It is important for readers to understand their relation to the reading act: why are they reading this and what do they want from the reading. Whatever purposes they bring to the reading will provide a significant context for making sense of a text.

5. ALL READING HAS A PUPOSE AND PURPOSE INFLUENCES THE CHOICES READERS MAKE AS THEY READ

This has been mentioned before, but comprehension begins with a reader being able to articulate why she is reading. Purpose influences 1) the way readers monitor meaning as they read, 2) use relevant prior knowledge (schemas), 3) ask questions as they read, 4) draw inferences from the material, 5) evoke images from the text, 6) determine the importance of elements in the text, 7) synthesize aspects of the text, and, ultimately, 8) determine the value of a text. These basic categories of reading strategies (Keene, *To Understand*) are activated by a reader’s sense of purpose. Purpose*less* reading leads to confusion, failure to collect relevant details, lack of recall, and lack of comprehension. Successful readers understand the purposes for engaging with a text and use that understanding to effectively engage with the information or experience of a text.