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How to Read a Textbook: Lesson Plan

There are two types of textbooks for English classes: a grammar-based book and a literature-based book. Both of these are written very differently and require different reading strategies.

First, the grammar book requires a type of reading that is most likely unfamiliar to students. Grammar textbooks are sectioned into types of grammar rules. In the individual chapters, typically the book lists a rule and provides ten to fifteen example questions to practice the rule, similar to most math textbooks that I have encountered. Therefore, I will teach students to read grammar textbooks using a three-step process: preview, read actively, and review¹.

In their preview of the section, students should read section headers in order to determine what the section is about as well as see which parts are instructional content and which are examples. I will explain to students that this overview will give them an idea of what to expect from their reading, how much time it may take, and how they want to organize their notes. I will provide an example projected on the board to demonstrate the type of information I would gain from my preview of the reading.

Next, students should read actively. I will explain to students that this is different from skim-reading or even the reading we do when we approach literature. Their active reading of

¹ This strategy is based upon *Reading a Textbook for True Understanding - Cornell College*, 2019.

their grammar text should include note-taking, practice with the example questions, and pauses after each section to check their own understanding. I will show students in my projected example how I first read the entire paragraph/short section *before* I decide what is important enough to highlight or write down in my notes. When I document definitions, I write them in my own words so that I am sure that I understand them. After writing down explanations of each section, I answer two to three of the example problems directly in my notes so I can see how the information is applied into authentic usages.

The third step students should take is reviewing their learning. After taking notes, I will demonstrate how I check my own understanding. I look for differences and similarities between grammar rules, such as colons and semicolons. I review my examples and make sure that they are clear references that I will understand in the future when I look back to them. Then I begin to answer the select questions that were assigned. I will remind my students that this step is essential in understanding grammar textbooks because we may cover many different rules in one reading and be expected to remember all of them while applying them in our own writing.

After covering these three steps, I will list them on the board for students to refer back to. Then I will allow them to begin the reading assignment, which will be done in class. After one or two times of reading grammar texts in class with guidance, I will begin to either assign readings as homework or as part of a bigger-picture assignment where they will be expected to know how to do the reading on their own.

The other type of text used in English classes is a literature textbook. These books are usually larger and include background information, related texts, reflection questions, and other additions to the core reading assignment. Most literature textbook reading is done in class due to the expense and size of the textbooks, so students will go into the reading with a time limit and

will most likely not be able to conveniently refer back to the textbook while working on assignments at home. This affects how they should approach the reading.

Many teachers try to approach literature reading with strategies aimed at getting everyone involved, but many of these strategies end up being unhelpful. According to Ivey and Fisher (2020), cold-call reading and “popcorn” reading strategies do not typically help students’ comprehension. Students who struggle reading out loud negatively affect the entire class’s comprehension and other students will focus on reading ahead to mentally practice their own section rather than listening to their peers. Not only this, but after students have had their opportunity to read, there is no motivating factor to keep them focused. Some ways to help “read-alouds” to be effective include choosing texts that are specific to the interests and needs of students, ensuring that there is a purpose for reading out loud and articulating that purpose to the students, modeling fluent reading for students, and allowing time for discussion of the reading during and after the read-aloud (Ivey & Fisher, 2020). Another strategy that may be helpful is breaking students up into small groups and having each student assign him or herself an active role in the reading. These roles include *Literary Luminary*, *Connector*, *Illustrator*, *Summarizer*, *Vocabulary Enricher*, and *Researcher* (Ivey & Fisher, 2020). This allows each student the responsibility of being an “expert” in different areas of the text so that they can be engaged and learn from one another.

Each time I have students read from their literature textbooks, I will remind them of two strategies that are helpful. First, they should hold the context of the reading in mind. This means that they should keep in mind the driving question of the day and see how it relates to the piece I am encouraging them to read. This context may include reading to find author’s intention, reading to determine crucial plot points, reading for insight into historical time periods, reading

to find literary features like figurative language or tone, or other approaches. I will always inform them of the context for why we are reading the text, and it will also be written on the board under our essential/driving question for the day. The other strategy they should use is stopping frequently to summarize what they read and to predict what may happen next. This will keep them engaged in the reading and ensure that they do not read an entire page or chapter and realize that they retained none of it. When I teach these two strategies, I will write them on the board (context and frequent pauses) so that students can refer back to them while reading in class.

References

Ivey, G., & Fisher, D. (2020). *Reading and Writing in English Classes*. Ascd.Org; ASCD.

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