

# Getting Your Students to Read

*Some of the reasons students do not read range from their lack of understanding complex or new concepts and vocabulary, not knowing exactly what (or how) to read, and not seeing the connection between required reading and lecture material.*

Reading textbook and other required material prepares students to be able to answer questions and contribute to classroom discussions. Reading can also help show students the connections between lecture and what they have read.

However, many students do not like to read, especially when it's required reading! Although there is a direct correlation between reading required material and course grades, many students avoid reading. Some of the reasons students do not read range from their lack of understanding complex or new concepts and vocabulary, not knowing exactly what (or how) to read, and not seeing the connection between required reading and lecture material.

Often, instructors offer "incentives" to encourage students to read such as giving pop quizzes, revisiting the course syllabus policy on textbook requirements or sharing words of wisdom (or threats!) about being successful in class. But in the end, many students avoid what they consider to be the tedious and time-consuming task of reading.

Bean, as cited in Learning Resource Networks (n.d.), identifies a number of reasons why university students struggle with and avoid reading. You might want to address these issues by implementing some of the strategies presented in this article.

- Students today skim for information, similar to how they process information they read online
- Students often multitask while reading (watch television, scan the internet, listen to music, text friends)
- Students may not know how to organize their reading based on the structure of textbooks and articles
- Students can have difficulty understanding the content, language and vocabulary in college textbooks and research articles

In a special issue of *Faculty Focus*, Weimer (2010) compiled 11 papers that address the problem of students not reading required course material. The following list has been excerpted from this publication and provides strategies that can immediately be implemented to help students become more involved with reading required course material. Authors cited in the 2010 publication include Bandeen, Culver and Morse and Weimer. Further details can be found in the reference list at the end of this article.

*State what you expect your student to do with the textbook and other readings.*

1. State what you expect your student to do with the textbook and other readings
  - Verbally announce and place in the course syllabus a statement about required readings and how they will be used in course discussions and assessments (exams and assignments)
  - Refer students to specific material in the textbook such as graphs, charts, lists and key words that relate to lecture material and assessments.

2. Provide an overview and introduction to the textbook and other required readings
  - Explain how the textbook is structured including chapter outlines, word lists, graphics and support material such as an online website and worksheets.
3. Connect the textbook and other readings
  - Show students how to underline key ideas and concepts and write them in the book margins or on paper. Then have students connect this information with lecture material by writing a few questions on identified key ideas and concepts.
4. Use graphic organizers
  - Demonstrate how students can summarize readings with graphic organizers, concept maps, charts or lists. While doing this, students can also scan chapter readings and make a list of headings, images, bolded words and graphics. They can then write questions that ask about the most important aspects of the chapter or how the chapter is organized. Students can submit the graphic organizers or concept maps for a few points each toward the final grade and/or be used to lead classroom discussions.
5. Assign reading journals
  - Assign students to create a reading response journal or activity in which each reading assignment is responded to with a question or comment that can be used in classroom or online discussions.
6. Suggest that students join a reading study group
  - Encourage students to join a reading study group in which a few students discuss required readings that focus on key ideas, terms or concepts after which a brief report is generated and submitted for a few points and/or to help lead classroom discussions.
7. Communicate your expectations regarding the textbook and readings throughout the semester
  - Remind students to bring their textbook to class (if you will be using it for discussions and activities)
  - Explain to students what (and why) they have to read before class begins
8. Stress that textbook reading requires effort and skill
  - Explain the complexity of college textbooks compared to high school textbooks and other reading material
  - Clarify the techniques necessary for reading textbooks and other readings and that just skimming or just reading once will not be enough to grasp content

*Assign students to create a reading response journal or activity in which each reading assignment is responded to with a question or comment that can be used in classroom or online discussions.*

*Share your own reading strategies to help students understand the effort necessary to fully understand complex information.*

- Share your own reading strategies to help students understand the effort necessary to fully understand complex information
- Show students how to use a textbook for studying such as rereading, asking questions in class and asking for assistance

9. Choose the right textbook

- Select textbooks and reading material that support course topics and lecture material. Avoid textbooks just “because you have always required them in the past.”
- Consider developing a course pack to supplement and/or replace the textbook. There is a growing trend in eBook creation and some publishers can help you create a personalized book for your class.

10. Model best practice

- Be a role model by reading the textbook and course material and incorporating it in lectures, assessments and course activities. Supplement required readings by reading current events and supportive material from popular media such as the Internet, trade journals and manuals and online newspapers.
- Include an alternative reading list to supplement required textbook and other material and show how these readings can expand understanding and knowledge of course content (newspapers, trade journals and reports, magazines, other course textbooks).

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11. Create an end-of-course reading list

- Provide an annotated reading list at the end of the course that is relevant but not specific to the subject to encourage “reading and learning beyond the classroom” (Dolence, 2004, p.13). This list can extend knowledge beyond the classroom and can help prepare students for subsequent courses in the discipline and employment in the field. The list can include movies, music, poems and popular media to which students would be particularly attracted.

### Summary

Use the strategies described above as a starting point as you explore ways to help students read required textbook and course materials. Through example and careful planning, getting your students to read will become a beneficial learning strategy to which students look forward.

### References

Dolence, D. M. (2010). The student-accessible reading list. In M. Weimer (Ed.), *11 Strategies for getting students to read what's assigned*.  
<http://www.FacultyFocus.com>

Learning Resource Networks, University of Wyoming (n.d.). LeaNing Notes #1: *Teaching critical reading at the college level*. [http://www.uwyo.edu/learn/files/docs/BrownBag\\_docs/LeaNingNotes01.pdf](http://www.uwyo.edu/learn/files/docs/BrownBag_docs/LeaNingNotes01.pdf)

Weimer, M. (Ed.), (July 2010). Faculty Focus Special Report: *11 Strategies for getting students to read what's assigned*. <http://www.FacultyFocus.com>  
(Access this article through a free subscription at [www.FacultyFocus.com](http://www.FacultyFocus.com))

### **Selected Resources**

Bandeem, H. M. (2010). Pre-reading strategies: Connecting expert understanding and novice learning. In M. Weimer (Ed.), *11 Strategies for getting students to read what's assigned*. <http://www.FacultyFocus.com>

Culver, T. F., & Morse, L. W. (2010). Helping students use their textbooks more effectively. In M. Weimer (Ed.), *11 Strategies for getting students to read what's assigned*. <http://www.FacultyFocus.com>

Hobson, E. H. (2004). *Getting students to read: Fourteen tips*. [http://www.theideacenter.org/sites/default/files/Idea\\_Paper\\_40.pdf](http://www.theideacenter.org/sites/default/files/Idea_Paper_40.pdf)

Roberts, J. C., & Roberts, K. A. (2008). Deep reading, cost benefit, and the construction of meaning: Enhancing reading comprehension and deep learning in sociology courses. *Teaching Sociology*, Vol. 36, pp. 125-140.

Weimer, M. (2010). Still more on developing reading skills. In M. Weimer (Ed.), *11 Strategies for getting students to read what's assigned*. <http://www.FacultyFocus.com>