



Pre-Reading Strategies

Purpose

Pre-reading strategies or *scaffolding* are activities designed to help students understand what they are about to read. These can include exploring prior relevant knowledge; establishing a purpose for reading the text; contextualizing the text canonically, socially, culturally, historically, and/or politically; and previewing content for the purpose of understanding the structure of the text. Conducting pre-reading activities encourages students to access relevant background knowledge; provides context for unknown and unfamiliar topics, themes and ideas; builds students' confidence in their ability to explore complex material; and engages students in useful dialogue with the instructor, each other, and their own pre-existing ideas about the text.

While there are multiple benefits for encouraging and participating in pre-reading activities with students, there are some challenges and concerns. Chief among these concerns are that students might not have an opportunity to experience the text neutrally without the input and context provided by the instructor or class discussion; the pre-reading activity might be too time-consuming and discourage students from reading the text itself; the pre-reading activity and ensuing discussion shifts the focus away from the salient issues of the text; instructor provides too much of preview and "makes the meaning" for students, thereby leaving very little intellectual work for the students; gives the impression that pre-reading is a substitute for reading; and finally, the students will become dependent upon the instructor's approach to previewing or directing pre-reading and will not benefit from individually interrogating or "vexing" a text, part of the experience of reading.

What is needed to address the concerns and preserve the intrinsic value of pre-reading to college readers is a clear focus on close-reading strategies, which require the instructor to have a deep understanding of the text and a well-prepared approach. Instructors can encourage students to contend with complex issues by considering carefully planned questions that will guide them toward deep understandings of important ideas through multiple readings of key passages.

Pre-Reading: Considerations/Determinations

- Consider the difference, if any, between the students' reading levels and the difficulty of the text.
- Consider the students' background knowledge about the topic and key concepts necessary to understanding a text's meaning(s).
- Determine the specific learning outcome addressed by requiring students to interact with the text.
- Determine if the topics, issues, skills and competencies necessary for the students to interact successfully with the text have been covered/achieved.

Pre-Reading: Guidelines

- Instructor must read the text, in its entirety, before students are assigned to do so to determine/affirm the purpose of the reading assignment; the information students will need to pre-read and read the text successfully; and how/when to provide the pre-reading activities.
- Pre-reading should be brief relative to the time estimated it will take students to read the text well.
- Pre-reading activities should stimulate students' curiosity about the text and enhance their desire to read the text.
- Pre-reading should not reveal information about the text that students could learn with relative ease from reading the text.
- Pre-reading can be iterative. Indeed, for longer and/or complex texts, it is more useful to design pre-reading activities that occur while the students are reading the text.
- Pre-reading can and should, in some cases, focus on vocabulary and concepts with which students have little experience.
- Instructor must engage in reflective practices specifically designed to question the achievement and



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maintenance of the balance between too little support and over-scaffolding in pre-reading activities.

Pre-Reading: Activities

Activating background knowledge; encouraging focused and interested reading; making predictions; and previewing text structure and genre to make predictions about what to expect.

- Skim first and last paragraphs, headers, photos and captions to get a general idea of the text. Share and discuss.
- In journal or in small groups, students answer a few pre-reading questions: What do I know about this topic? What do I want to know about this topic? Who is the author of the reading? What is the source? What do I expect the author to say about this topic? Why?
- In journaling or in small groups, students answer questions that are intended to elicit opinions about the given topic of the reading. For example: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? 1) Today's youth culture is centered on consumption. 2) We are all bound by our class, race, and gender. 3) Having material possessions make me feel good.
- In journal or small groups, students are given a quotation from the text and are asked to answer a few questions. For example, bell hooks asserts that "In part, youth culture's worship of wealth stems from the fact that it is easier to acquire money and goods than it is to find meaningful values and ethics, to know who you are and what you want to become, to make and sustain friends, to know love." 1) Restate the quotation in your own words. What does it mean? 2) What is an example of the main idea expressed in the quotation? 3) What do you think about it? Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Use a poem, song, video, image, cartoon, or a combination to spark interest in the topic.
- Pull a few key words from the text and introduce/review them to the class.