# Identifying & Addressing Reading Problems

<table>
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<th>Student Problem</th>
<th>Possible Strategies</th>
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| Poor reading process | • Give tests or writing assignments on readings that you don't cover in class.  
• Require students to write expressively in response to texts (reading logs, summary/response notebooks).  
• Require marginal notes.  
• Show students your own reading process and marginalia. |
| Failure to reconstruct arguments they read | • Assign summary writing.  
• Have students make outlines, flowcharts, or diagrams of articles.  
• Help students write "gist statements" in margins, summarizing main points as reading progresses.  
• Go through a sample text with students, writing "what it says" and "what it does" statements for each paragraph. |
| Failure to assimilate the unfamiliar; resistance to uncomfortable or disorienting views | • Explain this phenomenon to students so that they can watch out for it.  
• Point out instances in class when students resist an unfamiliar or uncomfortable idea  
• Draw analogies to other times when students have had to assimilate unfamiliar views.  
• In lectures or discussions, draw contrasts between ordinary ways of looking at the subject and the author's surprising way.  
• Emphasize the "believing" side more than the "doubting." |
| Limited understanding of rhetorical context | • Create reading guides that include information about the author and the rhetorical and historical context of the reading.  
• Through lectures or reading guides, set the stage for readings, especially primary materials.  
• Train students to ask these questions: Who is this author? To whom is he or she writing? What occasion prompted this writing? What is the author's purpose? |
| Failure to interact with the text | • Use any of the following response strategies: reading logs, summary/response notebooks, guided journals, marginal notations, reading guides. |
| Unfamiliarity with cultural codes | • Create reading guides explaining cultural codes, allusions, historical events, and so forth.  
• Show students the function of cultural codes by discussing the background knowledge needed to understand cartoons or jokes. |
| Unfamiliarity with vocabulary | • Urge students to acquire the habit of using the dictionary.  
• Create guides defining technical terms or words used in unusual ways. |
| Difficulty with complex syntax | • Have faith that practice helps.  
• Refer severe problems to a learning assistance center.  
• Have students "translate" complex passages into their own words.  
• Have students practice rewriting particularly long sentences into several shorter ones. |
| Failure to adapt to different kinds of discourse | • Explain your own reading process: when you skim, when you read carefully, when you study a text in detail, and so forth.  
• Explain how your own reading process varies when you encounter different genres of text: how to read a textbook versus a primary source; how to read a scientific paper; how to read a poem, and so forth. |

Source: