

Identifying & Addressing Reading Problems

Student Problem	Possible Strategies
Poor reading process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use any of the following response strategies: reading logs, summary/ response notebooks, guided journals, marginal notations, reading guides.
Unfamiliarity with cultural codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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:

From chapter eight of John C. Bean's *Engaging Ideas: The professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996.