FIVE TIPS FOR GETTING STUDENTS TO READ

College teachers can reduce their own and students’ frustration about course-based reading if they will consider students’ full range of educational needs and expectations as they make decisions about course structure (Lowman, 1995). Provided below are five recommendations about how to incorporate reading into courses.

TIP 1: NOT EVERY COURSE IS SERVED BY REQUIRING A TEXTBOOK  Consider not having a required textbook if:
- Course structure duplicates text material (i.e., in-class lecture and/or discussion primarily “covers” basic material found in the textbook).
- No available text offers a good fit with the course. Instead, use custom publishing options to create a course reading packet tailored to the course.
- The textbook is not absolutely essential. Use recommended reading lists with multiple copies of materials placed on library reserve.

TIP 2: “LESS IS MORE” APPLIES TO COURSE READING  A good reading list should contain fewer, carefully chosen selections, thereby reducing student perception of a Herculean workload (Lowman, 1995). Each of the remaining texts/reading assignments should connect obviously to the course: they should show up as part of in-class presentations, factor into course projects, or appear on examinations. Connections as obvious as these offer students an indisputable higher yield on their reading investment, thus increasing the likelihood that students will attempt the course reading assignments (Grunert, 1997; Maleki & Heerman, 1992).

TIP 3: USE SYLLABUS AS A TEACHING TOOL  At their best, strong course syllabi can affect student compliance with course reading assignments. Effective syllabi do more than identify required reading materials; they provide background about the materials so that students understand why the reading assignments contribute to learning and how they relate to other course content and course activities (Grunert, 1997; Maleki & Heerman, 1992).

TIP 4: ASSIGN READING CLOSE TO USE DATE  When these assignments are made close to the “use date” — the class session during which the information contained in that reading appears — students are more likely to read the assignments (Marshall, 1974; Davis, 1993; Lowman, 1995). One study, (Marshall, 1974) found that for students who were given reading assignments at the start of the term, documented “use was concentrated just prior to either the mid-term or end-of-term examinations. On the other hand, when short but frequent lists were assigned, use was dispersed quite evenly over weekly periods as well as over the whole term” (p. 455).

TIP 5: REQUIRE PRIOR READING  One reason that faculty assign course-based reading is so that students will, hopefully, be prepared and want to participate in subsequent class activity and discussions. To combat low reading compliance levels among students, McDougall and Cordeiro (1993) advocate the use of random questioning because relying on students to volunteer to participate in class discussion and activity “actually reinforces the ‘nonpreparation’ behavior of students who fail to volunteer” (p. 41).
RESOURCES

NOTE: This LT&ITC Tip is an excerpt from IDEA Paper #40: “Getting Students to Read: Fourteen Tips”. To read the entire paper (highly recommended) click here.

OTHER RESOURCES:
- Article on the importance of engagement for motivation in reading.
- Tips for students on how to read a difficult book or chapter.
- LT&ITC Library Book: Learning and Motivation in the Postsecondary Classroom.

TAGS: motivation, student engagement, syllabus, reading, active learning, course design

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