

Developing Student Reading Capacity

One question that often comes up in discussion during our various communities of practices concerns reading, both getting the students to do the readings and helping students develop a more critical eye. Below are some suggestions shared by faculty at Laurier and elsewhere.

Talk about what it means to be a X in your discipline (e.g., a geographer). How does a geographer think, problem solve, read, write, and so on? What questions do they implicitly ask themselves when approaching a particular text? What is the discourse of the discipline? How can we make more transparent and accessible to our students, what comes naturally to us as academics?

Develop an activity associated with the reading(s) that feeds into classroom discussion (or an assignment). For example, in one of our first year Religion and Culture courses - *Evil and Its Symbols* - the professor asks her students to identify a short passage or quote from the reading that is salient to them, and to write a short paragraph identifying why this passage or quote spoke to them and how it connects to the topic under study. Students hand their work in 24 hours before class. Their work becomes the foundation for discussion in the next class meeting. A portion of the students' total grade is assigned to these submissions.

Model critical reading in the classroom. I like the approach created by Professor Shelagh Crooks of St. Mary's University (Canada). In her class, she provides students with a short reading (it could be one from the assigned reading list) and, in groups, asks them to work through the following questions. These questions are taken up collectively. This exercise is repeated several times over a number of classes, thereby building student capacity and confidence to read with a more critical eye. Discipline specific questions could be added to the listed below to reflect one's discipline or subject area. You could also turn this exercise into an assignment.

Questions: (1) What is the topic under discussion? (2) What is the issue at hand? (3) What position does the author take? (4) What evidence does the author provide? (5) How credible is the evidence?

Other considerations:

- invite authors into the classroom via Skype or other technology to bring a reading to life
- provide a worksheet for students to document their thinking/discussion

Favourite Resource:

Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom (John Bean, 2011)

SoTL piece on reading:

- see review at: <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/an-exemplar-of-pedagogical-scholarship-takes-on-student-reading/>

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