

ACTIVITY ONE: READING TO SUPPORT WRITING

In academic writing, one of the key tasks is to analyze and synthesize information from multiple sources. For example, in a typical academic writing class, students might be tasked with writing summaries of several articles focused on a single topic. Once the summaries are complete, students must formulate a written response to the articles that includes a comprehensive look at the issues presented and an analysis of its causes and effects. In order to summarize a text, students must have a solid understanding of that text and, in order to respond, students must understand the text and take time to develop their own opinions and ideas related to the topic at hand.

In our first activity this month, we explain how to integrate reading early in the academic writing curriculum by teaching students to conduct close readings and annotations of their sources. A close reading is a type of intensive reading that includes making notes, or annotations, on the text. Close readings help readers focus on language, content, and ideas as a way to support comprehension and use of the material. In an academic writing class, close reading is the first step in teaching students how to conduct research and organize information.

Teaching students to conduct close readings and make annotations requires an emphasis on reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and intensive reading for details. Ultimately, close readings and annotations give students the tools to better navigate academic texts—texts that they will be expected to explain, synthesize, and evaluate in all of their academic writing assignments. This activity will show you how to teach students to closely read a text and make useful and relevant annotations to use in related writing tasks.

LEVEL

Advanced

LANGUAGE FOCUS

Writing
Reading

GOALS

During this activity, students will be able to:

- Annotate a text focusing on main ideas, key words, comments and opinions.
- Identify a text's main idea and subtopics by underlining and paraphrasing them.
- Learn and utilize two vocabulary strategies for recognizing new terms.
- Interact with the text through comments, questions, and opinions.

MATERIALS

- Sample annotation
- [Article: "Assessment literacy: Building a better base for teaching and learning"](#) (Rogier, 2014)
- Paper/pencils

PREPARATION

- Write the following questions on the board or create a handout for students:
 - How long does it take you to read an article for class?
 - Do you take notes while you read?
 - If you take notes, what information do you include in your notes?
 - What are some reasons we take notes while we read?
- Put students into pairs. One way to put students into pairs is to draw a line down the middle of the room. Tell students on one side of the room to stand and find a partner on the other side of the room.

PROCEDURE

1. Begin class by putting students into pairs.
2. Once in pairs, ask them to discuss the questions listed on the board for 5-7 minutes.
3. Bring the class back together as a large group. Ask students to share some of the answers they discussed. Then, focus on the last question: What are some reasons we take notes while we read?
 - a. As students share their answers and ideas, write them on the board.

4. When the students finish sharing ideas, write the word *annotate* on the board. Ask students what they think this word means.
 - a. Give students a hint: Are there parts of the word they recognize? *Notate* or *note*
 5. Tell students that they are going to annotate a text as a way to practice note-taking while they read. Explain that annotating texts can better help them understand the text and will prepare them to use the text later for research and writing purposes.
 6. Hand out a copy of the sample annotation.
 - a. Ask students to read through the sample annotation and make a list of the types of notes that are made.
 7. After students finish this, have them share their findings with the group while you write their responses on the board.
 8. Next, add any of the following to the list of things to include in a thorough annotation:
 - a. Comments/opinions on ideas, concepts, and/or information presented in the text
 - b. Questions about the text
 - c. Connections to prior knowledge
 - d. Vocabulary including two of the following: definition, connotation, translation, part of speech, and collocations. Remind them that fully acquiring a vocabulary term involves a complete understanding. By examining a new word from a few different angles, they will begin to have a clearer understanding of the vocabulary.
 - e. Underline/highlight main ideas and topic sentences
 - f. Paraphrase important ideas
 - g. Summarize ideas at end of each page
 9. Finally, give students the rest of the article used for the annotation. Tell them that they are now going to annotate the rest of the article by using the note-taking list. This task can be done as homework or in class.
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VARIATIONS

An alternative to this activity is to allow students to do the full article's annotation in pairs or small groups. When students work together to analyze a text, they pool their shared knowledge and offer ideas that they might not otherwise find on their own.

EXTENSIONS

This activity can be extended to include a written summary. By having students write a summary, they have a chance to move from note-taking to using the text in an academic writing task. The summary is a way to assess whether students can transfer the information from their notes and the text into their own words. The annotation and the summary helps prepare students for academic writing tasks that ask them to analyze and synthesize multiple texts.

REFERENCES

Rogier, D. (2014). Assessment literacy: Building a base for better teaching and learning. *English Teaching Forum*, 52(3). 2-13. Retrieved from <https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/english-teaching-forum-2014-volume-52-number-3#child-1783>