

MAKING CONNECTIONS WITH READING

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Abstract

In this paper, I suggest few strategies to get our students reading their textbooks and other course materials.

Introduction

Maryellen Weimer (2010) said that “getting students to read their textbooks is like pulling a hen’s teeth!”. Tiffany Culver and Linda Morse wrote that “most college students spend little time reading their texts. There’s research to confirm that ...”. These and many other literatures show that our students struggle in academic reading, and many try to avoid reading. One of the reason is that students do not find the connections between what they learn in the classroom and what they read in their textbooks. Particularly, many students avoid reading mathematics mainly because they are unable to understand the complex concepts. I ran some quick surveys in my classes in the last semesters. I found out that only less than 30% of the students use their textbooks regularly during the semester. On the other side, college textbooks are very expensive. In 2016, American Enterprise Institute reported that between January 1998 and July 2016, college textbook prices have increased by 90%, while recreational book prices fallen by more than 35%. Kathy Kristof (2018) wrote that the average cost of college textbooks has risen four times faster than the rate of inflation over the past 10 years. Meantime, there are several options available for reading. Our students can take a traditional book, or eText, they can read in a mobile app, or choose audio version of a book. In this context, we have to do something to get our students reading their textbooks and use their course materials efficiently.

Why reading textbooks?

There is a direct correlation between reading textbook and course grades. Reading course materials helps students to prepare for the class, exam, and discussions. After all, our students will be the future textbook writers, content developers, and reviewers. By reading the textbooks, they understand the organization of a textbook, the development of the chapters and their logical organizations. So, reading the required course materials is a good investment for a course.

Helping students to read their textbooks

In this section, I suggest some strategies we can adopt to help our students to make reading a part of their learning. Many of these suggestions can be found in detail in the references I listed below.

1. Introduce the textbook

Introduce the textbook on the first day of the semester. Talk about the important things: the authors, chapter outlines, organization of the contents, examples, graphs, its online resources and other features with students. Tell the students why we choose this particular textbook. Let them know what chapters and sections you plan to cover for the course, because students often do not know what to read out of the book.

Remind them frequently throughout the semester about the importance of reading for a successful completion of the course.

2. Use the textbook in teaching

Make the use of textbook with any supporting materials in teaching. Take this with you in the classroom and ask your students to bring their own textbooks to class. Make the reference of it while you teach; take examples, graphs and exercises from the book. State the chapter, section and page numbers you are in. Use it frequently and enthusiastically. Make the use of textbook as a part of teaching.

3. Patience and effort

Remind students that reading mathematics requires patience, time, and effort. A single reading may not be sufficient enough to comprehend the concepts. A good reading also requires some strategies: highlighting, scanning, and visualizing key concepts are some ways to go.

4. Connection between lecture materials and textbook readings

One of the reason students do not read their textbooks is that they do not find the connection between what they learn in the classroom and what they are reading in the textbooks. If their readings at home do not support the classroom learning next day in the class, they will not find the textbook helpful. Then, the students do not find it worthwhile to spend their time in reading. Making a connection will give them a purpose for reading.

Give students specific topics for reading to prepare for the next class: ask them to extract key ideas and have them relate this information in the class. Ask them to prepare some questions from each reading.

5. **Study groups**
Encourage students to form small reading groups. Ask them to meet regularly. Tell them to study the materials, take note of key ideas and discuss with each other.
6. **Set the expectations**
State the course reading expectations in the syllabus and let students know how you are going to incorporate readings in the course. This informs the students of what's expected of them. It will also motivate them and set the framework for the semester.
7. **Get the feedback from students-the readers**
Each semester, get students' feedback on their academic readings and make any necessary changes in future semesters.
8. **Reading assignments**
Maryellen Weimer (2010) stated that *if reading is not required, there is virtually no chance that students will read at all.*

Give students some reading assignments. Ask them to read a journal article or a section in a book. Also ask them to answer some questions or make a summary of key ideas. These things will help them be active readers.
9. **Talk about other supplemental materials**
Not all students have the same reading style. A single textbook may not satisfy them all. So, it is important to refer them with a good list of reading materials connected with the textbook.
10. **Choose a good book**
It is very important to pick appropriate textbooks along with other supporting materials. Consider students' cognitive levels, price, relevance of the materials and course objectives.
11. **Use various forms of reading materials**
Give students various forms of materials: paperback, eText, interactive figures, or audio version of the textbook.

Make reading a part of students' learning.

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