

# The College Success Reader



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# *To the Instructor*

## *Why The College Success Reader?*

### **Why Adopt *The College Success Reader*?**

*The College Success Reader* is a lively, eclectic volume of essays about college life and learning that can be used as a primary text in a variety of college classroom settings, especially those that emphasize the basic skills of reading, writing, and critical thinking. Its emphasis on introducing college students to the richness, complexity, and challenge of the college experience makes the text easily adaptable to the college success classroom as well.

The authors range from well-known writers such as Malcolm X, Adrienne Rich, and Anna Quindlen to an ordinary college student such as Christopher Lee, who despite a severe learning disability, managed to graduate from college and write a book about his heroic effort to succeed. The essays and apparatus are designed to stimulate animated small-group discussion among first-year college students who must find their own perspective on such difficult issues as academic honesty, balancing academic responsibilities with the need for personal growth, competition for grades, diversity, gender roles, and responsible sexuality.

Because the text is for and about first-year college students, college students played a substantial role in its overall concept, design, and evaluation. The essays were selected or approved on the basis of student interest and level of engagement.

The contents are grouped into five broad subject areas:

- Part 1, "The Motivation to Learn," opens with the success stories of Malcolm X and Christopher Lee and continues with motivational essays addressed to career-minded students, women, and adult learners.
- Part 2, "Learning to Learn," addresses some important academic issues, such as the value of liberal arts requirements, the lecture system, time management, how to prepare for and write essay exams, and academic integrity.
- Part 3, "Campus Culture," treats the nonacademic side of college life: student attitudes, binge drinking, fraternity and sorority life, intercollegiate athletics, and service learning.

- Part 4, “Sex and Relationships,” deals with perception and communication issues between men and women and includes discussions of date rape, gender differences, and gender bias.
- Part 5, “Living with Diversity,” treats multicultural issues such as ethnic and racial self-segregation and cultural stereotypes. It concludes with an upbeat essay by Diane Cole, “Don’t Just Stand There,” which offers practical suggestions on how ordinary college students can challenge prejudice and reduce racial hatred on their own campuses.

*The College Success Reader* offers many advantages for the instructor who is looking for an academically substantial reader that addresses issues of immediate concern to students and stimulates genuine student interest and response.

- It provides user-friendly apparatus—easy for instructors to teach from and enjoyable for students to use.
- It emphasizes the importance of careful reading, critical thinking, and audience-directed writing.
- Its editorial apparatus encourages active, cooperative learning in small groups.
- It challenges students intellectually rather than condescending to them.
- It treats students as adults who are responsible for their academic and personal success in college.
- It provides a realistic portrayal of college life.

*The College Success Reader* offers first-year college students the opportunity to read, think, speak, and write about the new institutional culture they have entered. As they wrestle with significant issues, students will be sharpening their skills in reading, reasoning, writing, and team building. Equally important, they will be making meaningful connections between their academic lives and real-world issues.

## Topical Coverage

*The College Success Reader* contains twenty-eight essays on topics of interest and importance to college students.

- The purposes of attending college and the motivation to learn
- Liberal arts requirements, time management, and academic integrity
- Campus environmental activism
- Fraternity and sorority life
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Sexual responsibility and safety

- Gender roles and stereotypes
- The diversity of American culture

Instructors are encouraged to assign only the readings that work best for them and to supplement the assigned readings with course pack materials tailored to each particular course.

## Text Features

*The College Success Reader* is supported by editorial elements designed to foster an interactive, team-based approach to learning.

- The text opens with two extended essays by the authors directed at the college student who is seeking a competitive edge in the twenty-first-century job market. “Active Reading” and “Active Writing” explain why effective reading, thinking, and writing skills are valued by employers and include practical suggestions for improving these essential skills.
- Each part begins with an introduction, which offers a wider perspective on the part topic and briefly introduces the essays in that part. The Introduction is followed by a prewriting activity called “Write Before You Read,” in which students reflect on what they already know about the topic before they begin reading. Each part contains five or six thematically related essays of varying length and complexity.
- Each essay begins with a preview introducing the essay topic and author. At the end of each essay are three activities designed to ensure active reading and clear writing about the essay topic. “Dialogue” consists of three questions intended to unpack the essay and stimulate class discussion. “Writing Topics” offers a full range of standard college-composition writing strategies, from free-written journal entries to formal, extended essays. Finally, “Interaction” is a focused group activity that encourages critical thinking, active communication, and team building.
- Each part concludes with an exercise called “Reflections,” which asks students to review the attitudes they described in the prewriting exercise and indicate how those attitudes have changed as a result of reading the essays in the part. This is followed by an optional writing assignment, which usually requires an extended formal essay dealing with some aspect of the part topic.

We are grateful not only to the authors and publishers of the essays for sharing their copyrighted work but also to the students and educators who reviewed the manuscript and made thoughtful suggestions for im-

provement. These include our student panel of reviewers from Eastern Michigan University—John Proffitt, Michael Rodman, and Jan Habarth; Dr. Christopher Burnham and Dr. Stuart Brown from New Mexico State University; Sally Firmin, Baylor University, Texas, Mary L. Hummel, University of Michigan, and Alexandra Jepson Rodgers, Florida State University. Finally, we want to thank Bill Webber, former director of Student Success Programs at Houghton Mifflin, and his outstanding production staff: Tamela Ambush, Jodi O'Rourke, Sarah Ambrose and Florence Cadran. Any errors that have survived this comprehensive review are entirely the responsibility of the authors.

R.H.

T.H.

# *To the Student*

## *Active Reading*

Each year for the past twenty-five years, the verbal skills of American students, as measured by standardized tests taken by high school seniors, have declined. Television and video games are usually blamed for the problem, but there are other causes as well.

- Schools have de-emphasized grammar and syntax, assigning less reading and writing and relying more heavily on short-answer and fill-in-the-blank writing assignments that are easier to grade.
- Most college-prep programs no longer require a foreign language, and almost none require Latin, which helps students understand the building blocks of language and from which nearly half of all English words are derived.
- Schools are relying more heavily on visual media, especially user-friendly computer programs and video games that ask only for key-stroke responses to verbal cues.

This all adds up to passive learning, which is the least effective kind. Reading, writing, and reciting are active processes; they take more effort but produce better results.

Although colleges are assigning less reading and writing than in years past, you can still expect to do a good deal of both during your college career, especially as you begin work in your major field. Students who put off taking required composition and literature courses until later in their college careers are making a big mistake, since the skills taught in these courses are applicable to virtually every course in the college curriculum. At the same time, students who take composition and literature immediately with the idea of getting them out of the way also are making a mistake. Reading and writing are skills that need to be continually honed; without constant practice, they rapidly deteriorate.

If you want to become an educated, successful person, you will need to become a habitual reader. If you have other time-consuming habits (watching TV, playing video games, shopping), consider making this rule for yourself: I will spend at least as much time reading in a day as I spend watching TV (or shopping or shooting hoops). A good corollary to this



rule is: I will do my reading first and the less demanding activity afterward, as a reward.

## Reading for Information

Much of the reading you will do in college and after you graduate will be for the sole purpose of acquiring information—rapidly processing factual information in textbooks, newspapers, journals, reports, manuals, and reference works. You might start your nonfiction habit by reading a good daily newspaper each morning (*New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*), a weekly newsmagazine (*Time*, *U.S. News & World Report*), or a monthly magazine (*Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, *Psychology Today*, *Consumer Reports*).

## Practice Active Reading

Since factual writing—especially in college textbooks—can sometimes be tedious, you'll need to make a special effort to involve yourself in the material. The best way to do this is to practice the active reading principles known as SQ3R.

1. **Survey.** Quickly preview the material. Examine the title, headings, and subheadings. What are the main ideas? How is the information organized?
2. **Question.** Transform the title, headings, and subheadings (main ideas) into questions. What questions can you expect to find answers to here?
3. **Read.** Read rapidly with a single purpose: to find answers to your questions. Raise (and answer) additional questions as you go along.
4. **Recite.** Stop periodically to look away from the text to see if you can recite (preferably aloud) the answers to your questions. Write the answers on a separate sheet of paper without referring to the text.
5. **Review.** When you finish, go over the entire text again, looking away from the text as much as possible, until you can recall it accurately.

Try to notice when your attention wanders. After one minute? Five minutes? Fifteen minutes? Break up your reading into time periods that coincide with your ability to concentrate. Stop whenever your attention wavers and do a quick body check: Am I alert? Am I getting tired? Has my mind been wandering? Am I getting too relaxed? Fatigue and boredom are reasons to take a break, not to quit. Take a brief time-out to psych yourself up for the next reading stint.

During your break, reject all negative thoughts (I'm bored. My mind is a sieve. This is dull stuff. I'm tired. This is too difficult. I don't understand. I wish I were doing something else.). Replace them with positive thoughts (I'm on a roll! My mind is a steel trap! I won't stop until I master this material!).

Always read with a pencil in hand and stay active as you read by marking up your text. This will personalize the text for you and help you internalize and remember the information. Following are some suggestions for marking up your text:

1. Write the *topic* of the text (answer to the question, What is this text about?) at the top of the page and draw a box around it in the text.
2. Look for a *definition* of the topic (usually this will occur early in the text). Underline it and write "DEF" in the column next to the definition.
3. Write "EX" in the column next to any *examples* or *illustrations*.
4. What are the major points the author is making? Number them in the text and circle the numbers.
5. Put a question mark in the column next to anything you don't understand.
6. Put an exclamation point in the column next to anything you think is interesting or important.
7. Relate the passage to your own life or to something you already know (the design of your ninth-grade science fair project, for example) by writing a brief note in the column. Draw a happy face or write "ME" next to it to identify it as your own idea.
8. Double-underline *major* ideas or definitions.
9. Single-underline *secondary* ideas or definitions.

Now imagine yourself being tested on your reading. If you were testing someone else on their reading of the text, what are some questions you might ask? Write out answers to your own questions.

Above all, try to see connections between what you're reading and what you already know. When you can find a connection between new knowledge and old knowledge, the new material will be more meaningful, and you will be more likely to remember it.

## Read Rapidly

When you're reading for pleasure, speed is pointless: rushing through a great poem is like wolfing down a gourmet meal. But if your purpose is to obtain and retain information, the faster you read and the more you remember, the better.

According to speed-reading expert Robert Zorn, the average adult reads about 200 words per minute (wpm). The average college student reads about 350 wpm (or one page per minute). Most readers, whatever their speed, comprehend about half of what they read. Since the quantity of reading declines after a person leaves school, college students read significantly faster than college graduates. Reading speed is a direct factor of constant practice.

With sustained practice and effort, it is possible to double or triple your reading speed in a matter of weeks while maintaining or even increasing your comprehension, and without spending money on instruction.

1. Increase your vocabulary by ten words a week. A larger vocabulary will enable you to read more difficult material faster. Running into words we don't understand slows us down.
2. Use a moving object as you read. The eye follows a moving object. As you read, move a pencil or three-by-five-inch index card down the page. Gradually increase the speed. Remember: your mind controls both your reading speed and the speed of your pencil. You must force the pencil to move slightly faster than the eye wants to move.
3. Reduce or eliminate regressions. A regression entails going back and rereading. According to Zorn, each regression costs you about fifty wpm. To eliminate regressions, Zorn suggests making a *reading window*. Take a three-by-five-inch index card and cut out a horizontal slit measuring two and a half inches by one-quarter inch. The card will block out extraneous material that diverts the eye and causes regressions.
4. Notice and eliminate body motion. Kinesthetic learners (people who habitually move their bodies while learning) are the slowest readers. Have someone watch you when you study: do you jiggle or rock to and fro? Notice it, concentrate on it, and stop it.
5. Notice and eliminate vocalizing. Aural or auditory learners talk, mumble, whisper, or hum to themselves as they read. Since people can read much faster than they can speak, vocalizing slows us down. (Zorn points out that George Washington was both a kinesthetic and an auditory learner—he read aloud on horseback!) Some auditory learners need noise—background music, for example—to learn; others need absolute quiet. What you need to eliminate is not necessarily background noise, but the tendency to move your lips and tongue and to hear the words as you read.
6. Use your eyes only. Visual learners are the fastest readers. Try to block out the stimulation of any other sense as you read.

7. Read in chunks. Rather than focusing / your eyes / on a single word / at a time, / try to / take in two or three words / (or a single thought unit) / at a time. Gradually increase the size of the chunks / to a whole line of print. At the end of a line, practice a *down-and-back* eye sweep. (The opposite, a *back-and-down* eye sweep, takes you back over the line you just read—a time-wasting regression.) Eventually, this zigzag eye motion will allow you to take in larger and larger chunks of print.

As you practice the techniques of rapid reading, you will find your comprehension declining at first. As you get better at it, your comprehension will soon be back to normal and then will begin to increase as your concentration improves.

There is certainly no harm in working with one of the many speed-reading aids available on the market—videos, computer software, tachistoscopes, eye-span trainers, and pace accelerators. Whether you use sophisticated training aids, take a speed-reading course, or practice the above principles on your own, you will need patience and many hours of concentrated effort. As with all the strategies and techniques for becoming a better student, you'll get the best results if you devise a plan and stick to it.

Expect to achieve modest gains from a concentrated speed-reading program, but remember that real learning is not just a matter of accumulating information. It is also a matter of processing that information, relating one idea to another and to your own life, applying information to the solution of a problem, thinking imaginatively, and making value judgments. Above all, learning brings pleasure and satisfaction, which speed-readers—grimly intent on acquiring data, repressing all sensual responses to a text, and setting new speed records—blithely ignore. Real learning occurs not while you are rapidly scanning a text, but when you look away and think about what you read.

## Reading for Pleasure

Aside from acquiring useful information, there are other purposes for, and benefits to be gained from, habitual reading. In the fifth century B.C., the Chinese philosopher Confucius (a contemporary of the Greek playwright Sophocles) cited a few of the pleasures of reading good literature.

- Reading “lifts the will,” inspiring us to do things we thought were impossible.
- It “sharpens the vision,” helping us see clearly what was formerly blurred.

- It helps us “make distinctions and resent evil.” Good literature clarifies our values and helps us not only to see the choices available to us but also to choose the right ones.
- It “confirms us in civic and domestic virtue.” In books we meet more people than we could ever meet in life. By measuring ourselves alongside them, we acquire a sense of our place in society and become more sensitive to the problems and needs of others.
- It “teaches the names of many birds, animals, plants, and trees.” While reading for pleasure, we are also acquiring valuable information from authors who have devoted many hours of study to their topics.

Wide reading gives a person a sense of command over the world and a sense of self-possession. Occasionally, you will have the good fortune to find just the right book at the right time, a book that speaks directly to you and changes your life. Although this happy event is largely a matter of serendipity, the chances of its happening will increase the more you read.

Wide reading is important to learning because to learn something new we need a context or background for learning. Learning feeds on itself. The more you know, the more you are able to learn. We can’t possibly live long enough, travel enough, experience enough, or meet enough people to learn all we need to know. Reading gives us an efficient and economical means of expanding the context of our lives. We may not have the time or money to travel to Tibet, but we can read a book about Tibet. We may never meet a General Motors executive, but we can read books about executive wheeling and dealing in the auto industry. We certainly will not wish personal tragedy upon ourselves, but we can prepare ourselves for it by imaginatively experiencing the suffering of others.

Reading is an acquired discipline and a lifelong habit. Your college schedule will leave you with precious little time for leisure reading. One way to form the habit is to keep a good book on your night table at all times and read yourself to sleep, even if it’s only five or ten minutes a night.

Choose reading material that is slightly challenging but still interesting. Just as children eventually cease to enjoy cotton candy, your taste in books will gradually become more sophisticated and your standards more demanding.

Following are some guidelines for selecting leisure reading:

- Try not to restrict yourself to one kind of reading material—Agatha Christie mysteries, sci-fi, self-help books, romances. Keep an open mind and try new authors and genres. Try books written by and about the opposite sex. Read books about cultures that are alien to you. If you

mostly read novels, try an occasional volume of history or biography. In other words, vary your reading diet.

- An exciting plot is just one of the many possible virtues of a novel. Learn to enjoy fiction for other reasons—style and character development, for example. Good stories don't always have happy endings. Look instead for an appropriate or satisfying ending.
- Seek out reading material that challenges your beliefs. When you find your values challenged, be grateful for the opportunity to reexamine your values and clarify them even further.
- Read the classics. (Mark Twain defined a classic as a book everybody wishes they had read but nobody has.) Classics are great books not because experts say they are, but because they have entertained, instructed, and permanently changed the lives of people for generations. They stay fresh and can be reread profitably. They grow on you.

## The Reading Habit

Habits—both good ones and bad ones—are the result of repetitive behavior over time. Following are some ways to develop a reading habit:

- Students spend a lot of time waiting in line—in the cafeteria, at registration, outside a professor's office, waiting for a ride. Since there's always a chance you might get stuck somewhere with nothing to do, get in the habit of carrying a small paperback in your purse or backpack. Nobel Prize-winning poet T. S. Eliot memorized all three volumes of Dante's *Divine Comedy*—and learned Italian in the process—while waiting for the Harvard Square bus!
- Keep a list of the books you've read with the date you completed them, along with a brief personal reaction—what you thought of the book, what you learned. You'll take great personal satisfaction in watching this list grow over time.
- Read with a pencil and your vocabulary notebook close at hand. Underline passages that strike you as beautifully composed or that contain ideas you want to remember. Write your own ideas in the column. Circle words you don't understand and add them to your vocabulary list. Try to be an active reader even when you're only reading for pleasure.

## Building Your Vocabulary

The English language contains more than 600,000 words. According to linguist William Safire, a well-educated person has a reading and writing vocabulary of only about 20,000 words but uses only 2,000 of them when

speaking. Twenty-five percent of our spoken vocabulary consists of only ten words. (*I* ranks first; *you* ranks second.) Our vocabulary increases by hundreds of words a year while we are in school; after we leave, it increases by only twenty-five to fifty words a year—proof that constant and active reading and learning are the keys to building a strong vocabulary.

The reason for developing a strong vocabulary is not because we need more words for ordinary conversation. Nor is it to impress people. The real reason is that words are tools for thinking about and understanding the world. One research study of successful Americans in all walks of life indicated a direct correlation between vocabulary range and salary within a profession. Language gives us power and mastery over our environment. When you add a new word to your vocabulary, you acquire a new idea, a new way of seeing, a new avenue of thought. In your other courses, you are being introduced to the mysteries of an academic discipline primarily by being introduced to its essential vocabulary.

Words are the tools by which humans think. Some students say, “I know what I mean, but I just can’t express it.” Although this is sometimes true of feelings and ineffable experiences (love or moments of spiritual insight), it is rarely true of ideas. If we don’t have the words, we don’t have the idea.

The best way to increase your vocabulary is to read actively. When you encounter a word that you’d like to add to your vocabulary, circle it and, at the first opportunity, write it in a notebook used only for that purpose. Write down both the word and the context in which it appeared. Look it up in a good dictionary (most paperback dictionaries are inadequate because they don’t give alternative meanings and word origins) and record the definition. Note the etymology (how the word evolved) and other meanings. Note how the word is pronounced; say it out loud. At your first opportunity, use the new word in a conversation or in a paper you’re writing. Actually using the word yourself is a crucial step toward making the word your own.

Be on the lookout for new words. Make it a private, active hobby. As you look for new vocabulary words, be selective. Pick words you’ve heard before but whose meaning is unclear to you (vocabulary experts call these “frontier words”). Sometimes you’ll hear a new word in a lecture and then see it again in your reading a day or two later. Those are good words to zero in on. Pick words that sound interesting to you and that you think might be useful to you. Unless they’re related to your major interest, avoid technical terms that you may never see again and will probably never use. Limit your vocabulary-building program to about ten words a week. Review all your words once a week (use three-by-five-inch flash cards if you like) or have someone test you on them.

Buy a small notebook that you will use exclusively for vocabulary building. Over the next week, find ten new words that you want to add to your vocabulary. For each word, write down the following information:

1. The word itself (in capital letters)
2. The pronunciation of the word (unless it's obvious)
3. The preferred (first) dictionary definition
4. The etymology (only if it's interesting or helpful for you)
5. The context in which you heard or read the word

Bring your notebook to class a week from now and show your instructor or share with your group your first ten words. After that, keep it up—ten words a week.

Always relate a word to an idea that has meaning to you. It's a waste of time to memorize definitions in a vacuum. If you acquire new words at the same rate as you acquire new ideas, you'll find that both your rate of learning and your rate of vocabulary building will gradually accelerate. A new idea introduces you to ten new words. A new word opens up ten new ideas.

## **Keeping a Journal**

In many college success courses, students are required to keep a journal. You could begin your journal by writing about your reading habits, using the following questions as a guide:

1. Are you a fast or slow reader? Do you think your reading comprehension would improve or decline if you forced yourself to read faster?
2. Sometimes people read just for pleasure and sometimes just for information. Do the two forms of reading call for different strategies and techniques? For example, do you read faster or slower when reading for information?
3. Describe a book you read recently for pleasure. What did you like about it?
4. Can you list five books that you read during the past year and briefly describe their contents? List five more that you've heard something about and would like to read. Why do these books interest you?
5. How would you describe your vocabulary? What conscious steps have you taken, if any, to improve it? How would a stronger vocabulary benefit you?

Journal writing should be free and easy. Don't censor yourself too much or worry about spelling and grammar. Write as fast as you can think.



## **Summary**

Although habitual readers are sometimes stereotyped as antisocial, ivory tower types, reading is actually a social activity. Words are the primary tools by which human beings communicate with each other.

Active, habitual readers acquire powerful tools for living. The ability to read rapidly with good comprehension is not only essential to success in college but also indispensable in today's job market. Habitual readers tend to be good writers and clear thinkers with a good understanding of human nature. Reading for information teaches us to analyze and synthesize, to think critically and creatively, and to express ourselves clearly. Reading imaginative literature gives us a better understanding of human nature as we encounter a gallery of characters we will never have the opportunity to meet in life. A happy byproduct of the reading habit is a powerful vocabulary—a common characteristic of successful people.