

Strategies for  
College Reading  
and Thinking

Nancy V. Wood



**Strategies  
for College  
Reading  
and Thinking**

**Nancy V. Wood**

*University of Texas at Arlington*

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**Strategies for College Reading and Thinking**

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## About the Author

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**Nancy V. Wood** is associate professor of English and the Director of the Integrated Program in Reading, Writing, and Critical Thinking at the University of Texas at Arlington. She is the author of *College Reading and Study Skills*, now in its fourth edition, and *Improving Reading*. She has also published articles in the *Journal of Reading*, the *Journal of Developmental Education*, the *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, and others. She earned her masters and doctorate degrees at Cornell and Rutgers Universities. She works actively with the Texas Academic Skills Program, a statewide basic skills testing and instructional program that seeks to identify needs and provide instruction for college students in reading, writing, or mathematics to help them succeed in their other college classes. She has also taught reading classes for many years at three universities.

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## Preface

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Instruction in this college reading textbook is based on recent research that recognizes reading as an active process that requires the reader to draw on previously learned information and to use conscious reading strategies, as well as frequent comprehension checks, to achieve an effective understanding of college materials. The book will help students learn to read the textbooks, library research materials, supplementary books, and articles that are assigned in both two-year and four-year colleges. Reading exercises are drawn from such sources so that students will have an opportunity to practice on the types of material they will actually be assigned to read in college. Acknowledgment is made early in the book that instruction in the reading process must proceed in stages, beginning with what students are already likely to know and are able to accomplish with comparative ease and progressing later to more complicated and difficult strategies and materials. Study reading and critical reading receive the greatest attention. However, students are also taught flexible reading and test-taking strategies.

### Student Audience and Classroom Testing

This textbook is appropriate for developmental readers who test between the sixth- and ninth-grade reading levels on a standardized test, such as the Nelsen Denny, or below 70 on the Degrees of Reading Power test. This book has been extensively classroom tested with students who test in these ranges in both two-year and four-year colleges. The first twelve chapters of the book were used as the textbook in semester-long reading classes at the El Paso Community College and at the University of Texas at El Paso in spring 1989. The classes were comprised mainly of Hispanic students. At both institutions students were given the Nelsen Denny and the Degrees of Reading Power tests at the beginning and at the end of instruction. Pretest scores on the Nelsen Denny ranged from 3.7 to 7.7 and on the DRP from 47 to 73. All students scored significant gains on at least one of the posttests. All but one student improved posttest scores on both tests. More significant, students indicated on final evaluations and in final conferences that they were able to read the chapters and do the exercises. They also identified the parts of the text that were difficult, boring, or unclear and exercises that were unproductive or difficult. All of their recommendations for changes were followed during final revisions.

This textbook was further checked for level and appropriateness for its intended student audience during summer 1989. Twenty cross-discipline faculty at Southwest

Texas Junior College in Uvalde, Texas, used it as a textbook in a reading and thinking across the curriculum seminar designed to help them integrate reading and critical thinking instruction with their regular course work. During the seminar this faculty also evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of this textbook. All exercises and explanations that were either difficult, unclear, or inappropriate for their students were changed during the process of revision.

A basic goal throughout all of the testing and revision has been to produce a book that will help students learn to perceive their college assignments as their most pressing reading priority and use this book to help them learn to do that reading strategically and effectively. Many students who take reading improvement in college are neither skilled nor motivated readers, and college reading assignments at first often seem difficult, tedious, or boring to them. The particular challenge and intent of this book has been to keep chapter explanations short, clear, and simple so that students can read and apply them with comparative ease. Exercises, on the other hand, are graduated to reflect the types of reading students will encounter in their college classes. The students who read the test copies of this book reported that both chapters and exercises became more difficult in the second half of the book but that they also became more challenging and interesting.

## Content and Organization

The idea that students can be taught a sequence of activities that will end in comprehension is the organizing principle in this book. In Chapter 1 students are taught to think about what they already know about the reading process so that they will have a recognizable core of information and familiar activities on which they can build. Chapter 1 also functions as an emergency chapter to give students the preliminary information and confidence they need to begin reading their college assignments. Each subsequent chapter adds an additional layer of information and specialized reading activities, referred to as *reading strategies* in this book, to help students develop the awareness and skill necessary to comprehend their assignments. In Chapter 12 students are taught to organize and summarize what they have learned about the reading process and to apply it to longer reading exercises that are representative of college assignments. The aim of Chapter 12 is to provide students with a synthesis of clear procedures and techniques to help them read their future assignments.

The first twelve chapters present a holistic approach to the process of reading. Thus, students first examine the structure and organizational plan of what they are about to read. Later they analyze smaller units, such as sections, paragraphs, and sentences, to learn how each contributes to the meaning of the whole. The purpose of Chapters 1 through 7 is to teach students the prereading and study reading strategies that they need to do routine reading assignments.

Chapters 8 through 11 teach students more advanced critical reading strategies that will enable them to analyze, interpret, and evaluate the materials they read and thus meet the demands of assignments that require such special abilities. Chapter 8 teaches inferential reading; Chapter 9 teaches the strategies necessary to recognize controversy and the author's point of view; Chapter 10 teaches how to read persuasive texts, including how to evaluate different types of evidence such as fact and opinion; and Chapter 11 teaches students to think critically and to use what they have read to generate their own ideas. Chapter 12 summarizes the process.

Chapter 13 presents a variety of ways to help students speed up the reading process. Students learn to skim, scan, read selectively, and increase their general reading rate so that they can more effectively cover the massive amounts of reading they are often assigned in college. Chapter 13 also helps students learn to be selective in the material they read, to scan parts, and to read other parts in depth.



Chapter 14 focuses on the usual end product of the study-reading process: taking tests. It teaches students how to demonstrate what they have learned from reading on various types of examinations, including both instructor-made and standardized exams.

## **Chapter Format and Exercises**

Each chapter in this book contains brief and clearly stated information labeled “What You Need to Know” that explains discrete aspects of the reading process. These explanations are followed by lists of specific reading strategies labeled “What You Need to Do” that help students organize the theory and use it. Finally, as students work the exercises provided at the end of each chapter, they practice using the strategies immediately and then repeatedly throughout the book so that the strategies gradually become habitual components of the reading process.

Five types of exercises are provided at the end of most chapters. First, “Complete the Chapter Summary,” a cloze exercise, encourages accurate comprehension and review of the material taught in the chapter. Next, “Practice the Strategies” exercises provide immediate application and reinforcement of strategies. Third, “Class Exercises” provide opportunities for collaborative learning in class, either for pairs or small groups of students. Fourth, “Topics for Your Reading Journal” invite affective responses and reflective self-evaluation. A number of researchers now believe that writing in reading journals helps students reflect on the cognitive processes and techniques they use to read. Such reflection, in turn, helps them make a commitment to the new processes and techniques that they are learning so that they will be more likely to use them to read for their other classes. Finally, “Application Exercises” send students to their other textbooks for further practice of the strategies on the real reading they must do for their other classes.

All exercises require active participation from students and include not only practice in reading but also in summarizing, monitoring comprehension, thinking, analyzing, mapping, reorganizing, and writing. Because of the results of much modern research, the final written products of such practice exercises are regarded as useful, accurate, and practical ways to check college students’ comprehension. They are favored over multiple-choice questions.

## **Practical Considerations**

Possible answers to most of the exercises are provided in the *Instructor’s Manual* that accompanies this textbook. These answers can be extracted and circulated to enable students to check their own work when necessary. Multiple-choice exams are also provided in the *Instructor’s Manual* along with specific recommendations for teaching the material in each chapter.

One of the instructors who classroom tested this manuscript was deliberately selected for her inexperience in teaching college reading. A goal of this project has been to create a textbook that this instructor and others like her, graduate students and others new to the teaching of college reading, could use with comparative ease and success. This instructor describes in the *Instructor’s Manual* how she taught with this textbook and the positive results that she achieved.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to acknowledge and thank the many colleagues and students who played key roles in the development of this book. David Salazar of El Paso Community College and Mary Caldwell at the University of Texas at El Paso taught the classes

where the book was tested in manuscript form. I am grateful to them and to their students for their thorough critiques and suggestions for improvement. Students Adelberto Trujillo and Adela Rueda were particularly thorough and insightful in their critiques. I am also indebted to David England and to the faculty at Southwest Texas Junior College who read and critiqued these materials in a reading and thinking across the curriculum workshop. I have been privileged the past two years to have been a member of two state college reading committees that were charged with the development of a new reading test and also with the identification of the specific competencies required for college reading. Both were start-up activities for the Texas Academic Skills Program that tests and remediates basic skills in all public colleges throughout the state. Thirty college reading faculty selected from both two- and four-year colleges met frequently to define the reading competencies and to advise the testing company on the development of the reading test. Working with this extremely competent group has helped me significantly with the development of the ideas in this textbook.

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Many of the strategies and techniques taught in *Strategies for College Reading and Thinking* are based on current research. I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to the following sources:

*Chapter 1:* For an explanation of backgrounding and why it works see the essay by Beverley L. Zakaluk, S. Jay Samuels, and Barbara M. Taylor, "A Simple Technique for Estimating Prior Knowledge: Word Association," *Journal of Reading*, Oct., 1986, 56–60. See also Judith A. Langer and Victoria Purcell-Gates, "Knowledge and Comprehension: Helping Students Use What They Know," in *Reading, Thinking, and Concept Development*, ed. by Theodore L. Harris and Eric J. Cooper (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1985), pp. 53–68.

*Chapter 2:* The steps for surveying are also described in my other textbooks, *College Reading and Study Skills*, 4th ed., New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1991 and *Improving Reading*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984.

*Chapter 3:* I am indebted to Robert J. Sternberg, Janet S. Powell, and Daniel B. Kaye for the distinction between internal and external clues to the meanings of words as explained in their article "Teaching Vocabulary-building Skills: A Contextual Approach," *Communicating with Computers in the Classroom: Prospects for Applied Cognitive Science*, A. C. Wilkinson (ed.), New York: Academic Press, 1983.



I am indebted to Randall James Ryder for some of the ideas related to context clues. See his article, "Teaching Vocabulary Through External Context Clues," *Journal of Reading*, Oct. 1986, 61-65.

I am indebted to Maryann Dubree for the idea for Exercise 5 in "Practice the Strategies."

Vocabulary sheets are also explained in my textbook, *College Reading and Study Skills*, 4th ed., New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1991, pp. 84-89.

*Chapter 4:* For a more complete description of "story grammars" see Bonnie J. F. Meyer and G. Elizabeth Rice, "The Structure of Text," *Handbook of Reading Research*, P. David Pearson (ed.), New York: Longman, 1984, pp. 338-340.

For additional ideas for varying map formats see Richard Sinatra, Josephine Stake-Gemake, and Nancy Wyche Morgan, "Using Semantic Mapping after Reading to Organize and Write Original Discourse," *Journal of Reading*, Oct. 1986, 4-13. See also Jeannete L. Miccinati, "Mapping the Terrain: Connecting Reading with Academic Writing," *Journal of Reading*, Mar. 1988, 542-552, and Patricia L. Smith and Gail E. Tompkins, "Structured Notetaking: A New Strategy for Content Area Readers," *Journal of Reading*, Oct. 1988, 46-53.

*Chapter 5:* Some of the ideas about summarizing are drawn from David A. Hayes' article "Helping Students GRASP the Knack of Writing Summaries," *Journal of Reading*, Nov., 1989, 96-101.

*Chapter 8:* For further analysis of the writer-reader relationship described in Chapter 8, see S. Jay Samuels and Michael L. Kamil, "Models of the Reading Process," in *Handbook of Reading Research*, P. David Pearson (ed.), New York: Longman, 1984, p. 207.

The useful distinction between the two types of information required for inferencing is explained in detail in Christine J. Gordon, "Modeling Inference Awareness Across the Curriculum," *Journal of Reading*, Feb. 1985, 444-447.

Andrew Ortony's essay, "Understanding Figurative Language" provides additional useful information about this topic in *Handbook of Reading Research*, P. David Pearson (ed.), New York: Longman, 1984, p. 457-470.

The useful distinction between authorized and unauthorized inferences is explained at length by Herbert H. Clark, "Inferences in Comprehension," in *Basic Processes in Reading: Perception and Comprehension*, David Laberge and S. Jay Samuels (eds.), Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 1977, pp. 243-263.

*Chapter 9:* The anticipation-reaction guide used in the class exercises in this chapter had its genesis in an article by Bonnie Ericson, Mary Hubler, Thomas W. Bean, Christine C. Smith, and Joanna Vellone McKenzie, "Increasing Critical Reading in Junior High Classrooms," *Journal of Reading*, Feb. 1987, 430-439.

*Chapter 11:* I am indebted to Professors Katherine Staudt, Larry Jones, William Cornell, Wayne Fuller, Guido Barrientos, and John Hedderson at the University of Texas at El Paso for the examples of some of the common questions asked in particular disciplines.

*Chapter 12:* For the basic idea in the final exercises in Chapter 12 I am indebted to Olive S. Niles, "Integration of Content and Instruction," in *Reading, Thinking, and Concept Development*, Theodore L. Harris and Eric J. Cooper (eds.), New York: College Board Publications, 1985, pp. 177-190.

*Chapter 13:* For further information on text readability see Judith Westpal Irwin, "Text Structure and Comprehension: New Directions for Readability," *Twenty-ninth National Reading Conference Yearbook*, 1980, pp. 313-319.

Nancy V. Wood

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## TO THE STUDENT

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### What You Need to Know About Chapter Organization

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Each chapter in this book is divided into four main parts. Thus, each begins with “Prereading Exercises” to help you think about and concentrate on the topic. The second part of each chapter presents theory that helps you understand “What You Need to Know” about the topic to improve your reading. The third part helps you apply the theory by describing active reading strategies that teach you “What You Need to Do” to improve your reading. Finally, at the end of each chapter, a variety of “Exercises and Activities” help you practice and use what you have learned in the chapter.

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Part

# 1

*Prereading  
Strategies*



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## C h a p t e r

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# 1

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### *College Reading: Use What You Know to Get Started*

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#### **Chapter Goals**

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1. To help you understand the requirements of college reading and what you need to learn to do it well.
2. To teach you to use your present background and experience to help you read in college.
3. To provide you with the first five active reading strategies to help you preread your first assignments.

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#### **Prereading Exercises**

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##### **Background the Chapter**

Each chapter in this book begins with an exercise that encourages you to think about the subject of the chapter and to try to remember what you may already know about it. This process, which will help you concentrate and get meaning from the rest of the chapter, is called **backgrounding**. Backgrounding is valuable because it enables you to discover and organize what you already know about a subject. Then you can learn new material more easily through the process of association. Backgrounding also helps you get a sense of how easy or how difficult new material will be for you to read. If you have a great deal of background about the subject, the new material will be easy to read. If you have little or none, it will seem more difficult, and you will need to read more slowly, using some of the strategies taught in this book to help you get meaning.

**Instructions**

1. For each backgrounding exercise you will be given a word or phrase that describes the subject of the chapter.
2. This word or phrase will be repeated ten times down the page with blank spaces next to it. In those blanks write words that the word or phrase brings to your mind. Try mainly to write ideas. You may also, however, write things, places, events, or feelings. For example, if the word is *test* you might write: study/hard/S.A.T./read and write/multiple choice/scary/grade/true or false/essay/Spanish test.
3. Fill in as many blanks as you can. You are not expected to fill all blanks every time. If you have little or no background, you may not be able to fill any blanks. This is acceptable. It simply means that you may have to work harder to get meaning.
4. Repeat the word or phrase over and over to yourself as you write.
5. Now background the subject of this chapter: *college reading*.

college reading 1. \_\_\_\_\_

college reading 2. \_\_\_\_\_

college reading 3. \_\_\_\_\_

college reading 4. \_\_\_\_\_

college reading 5. \_\_\_\_\_

college reading 6. \_\_\_\_\_

college reading 7. \_\_\_\_\_

college reading 8. \_\_\_\_\_

college reading 9. \_\_\_\_\_

college reading 10. \_\_\_\_\_

What did the phrase college reading make you think of? There are no “correct” responses. Typical responses, however, might be: textbooks/library books/lots of it/new subjects/hard/time-consuming/take notes/learn/remember/take tests. Your list, whether it is similar to this one or not, will probably show that you expect college reading to be different from the reading you have done in the past. The purpose of this chapter is to help you explore some of these differences and also to teach you some strategies to help you get started in reading your first college assignments.

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## What You Need to Know about College Reading

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### How Is College Reading Different from Other Reading?

In college you will read more different types of material than you ever have before. You will read both textbooks and supplementary books, and some of these will have been written in other centuries. You will also read scholarly articles and reports, class handouts and instructions, exam questions, library materials of all sorts, and the various types of information and instructions that appear on computer screens.