



*Reading
in the
Academic
Environment*



Mary L. Dillard

Reading in the Academic Environment

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Preface

MY DEVELOPMENTAL READING PROGRAM

My open-admissions university has mandatory testing, placement, and exit exams. Students are placed into developmental composition and developmental reading according to their placement scores. We offer two developmental reading courses, and our reading students can exit from the lower-level reading course to the higher-level one or exit to the regular freshman English program.

Students reading below the ninth-grade level are placed in the lower-level course. The upper-level course is for students placing on the ninth- and tenth-grade levels, and *Reading in the Academic Environment* is used as its text. I have found that students on the ninth- and tenth-grade levels often bottom out and have a difficult time increasing their reading skills. They can usually operate efficiently in the real world but have difficulty in the academic one. To exit our reading program, a student must score an eleventh-grade equivalency on the Nelson Denny Reading Test. This exit score may seem low, but I justify it mainly because of research on GPAs done a year after students completed their reading course. When I used the eleventh-grade equivalency exit score at a university in Louisiana where I served as developmental reading coordinator for five years, I found that those students who exited on the eleventh-grade level had a GPA less than a letter grade lower than those who exited at higher levels. Because there is no significant difference in GPAs and because of complaints about timed tests, I feel that the lower exit score is justified.

MY STUDENTS

One of the delights of going to developmental education conferences—like the National Association of Developmental Education (NADE) or the College Division of College Reading Association (CRA)—is talking with fellow teachers about my students and their problems. The students at my university are basically first-generation college students, on financial aid, from south central Ohio and Kentucky. Many of the traditional-age students had not planned on going to college and therefore did not take appropriate high-school courses; others spent their school years involved in extracurricular activities that took time from their academic studies. I have an increasing number of middle-class, white, single mothers who are coming straight from high school. I have had two students who have had babies during the quarter and returned to finish the class. Nontraditional or returning students, whose academic

skills are rusty, are also present in my classes. They may have been out of school for five to twenty years before deciding to go to college. Many students, traditional and nontraditional, work full-time jobs and take a full load of classes at the same time. When I first started teaching developmental English, I was very judgmental about students who were not performing well. Now I try to find out what is going on in their lives and try to work with them.

The local culture stresses sports, beauty pageants, country and gospel music, and a sense of family. The students are mostly interested in job training, not an education, even though most of them plan to get a four-year degree. I try to build on what they bring to the classroom. I think of Louise Rosenblatt's statement that the more they know before they read, the more they learn when they read. How do we give them a rich and varied background so that they can be successful readers in their college-level courses? When their life experiences are limited, I try to introduce new ideas and types of writing to them. This is part of what the book is about.

MY DEVELOPMENTAL READING TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Besides teaching at the university level, I have taught developmental English at two church-sponsored colleges, one a four-year college and one a junior college. I have also taught developmental English at a public technical college located on a psychiatric hospital's grounds. I am a graduate of the Kellogg Institute (1984), where I found my new mission in teaching: helping the underprepared. For years I have attended NADE, CRA, and IRA conferences, where I have absorbed ideas and adapted them to meet my needs. For example, I do not remember who first used *recreational* for *pleasure* reading or *overview* instead of *preview*, but I like the terms and have made them my own. I never seem to burn out in this field because I never solve all the problems. If I ever get it right, I think I'll retire.

THE TEXTBOOK

This textbook is called *Reading in the Academic Environment* to emphasize that academic reading is different from everyday reading. It requires a different set of skills for success. Just as the academic environment is different from the everyday world, academic reading is different from everyday reading in that the level is higher, writing patterns and patterns of organization are more complex, and the density of concepts can be enormous. Textbook authors often assume background knowledge and experience on the part of the student that simply is not there. The complexity of ideas can be staggering, especially to the student with little background knowledge or interest in a subject. Along with learning the reading skills necessary for academic success, students must transfer and practice what they learn; they must practice reading difficult material on difficult subjects. Reading simple but entertaining and relevant stories or newsmagazines is highly motivational and often leads to good class discussions and high-energy sessions. Students often learn to enjoy reading and thinking in such classes. The problem with such classes is that often there is not enough *academic* writing (as opposed to mainstream writing) for students to analyze and sort out. They are not exposed to in-depth discussions

of a topic, a great amount of specialized vocabulary, or complex organizational patterns and writing styles. Content-area reading provides such challenges.

The writing of this book came out of years of frustration at not being able to find a textbook appropriate for the ninth- and tenth-grade reading level of my students. I wanted to work on various levels of comprehension because of Delores Durkin's observation that we test, not teach, comprehension, and because of my observation that my students were good at answering literal-level questions but had difficulty seeing the significance of the answers. I wanted to work with degrees of knowing vocabulary words, not just matching words with definitions. I wanted to use longer passages so that a reader's understanding of anaphoric and transitional devices could be observed. I also wanted to use difficult material and teach my students about the self-esteem that comes with being able to read it. I used several good books but always found something missing. I used an ESL book and wrote my own lessons based on the readings in the book and had them printed in the university print shop. I next used readings from the ESL textbook combined with my lessons and had them custom printed in another state. When the company printing that book had difficulty getting copyrights for the reading selections, I asked my husband to write some chapters that I could use in class. Luckily for me, he has taught developmental English and helped write a developmental composition textbook with members of his English Department, so he understood what I needed. He was so concerned about my frustration over copyrights that he did not even use anything from the thirteen books he has published. From that point, the book grew and changed.

Each of the two parts of the book has introductory material on the chapters, an organizational plan, and a method for teaching. Part I contains information on comprehension, vocabulary, reading speed, the content-area chapters, and suggestions for using the chapters. Part II discusses differences in the two parts, vocabulary, and comprehension. It also contains an overview of the study skills introduced and an overview of the textbook chapters and closes with an explanation of the method for teaching incorporated in the lessons.

VOCABULARY

The workshops of Sherri Nist and Michelle Simpson have greatly influenced the way I now teach vocabulary. Anyone who has used their textbooks or attended their vocabulary workshops will remember their Conceptual Word Knowledge iceberg. For those unfamiliar with their work, their textbook *Developing Vocabulary Concepts for College Thinking* (1997, pp. 14–15) contains a good explanation. Briefly, the iceberg above the water level represents the word's definition while the part of the iceberg below represents the deeper meanings, synonyms and antonyms, examples and nonexamples, connotations, and other forms of the word.

METHOD

Two of the greatest influences on my teaching content-area reading are John E. Readence, David W. Moore, and Robert J. Rickelman's *Prereading Activities for Content Area Reading and Learning*, and an older book, John E. Readence, Thomas W. Bean, and R. Scott Baldwin's *Content Area Reading: An Integrated Approach*. Other

reading specialists have also influenced me, especially Richard and Joanne Vacca, Jeanne Schumm, and Shawn Post. Bess Hinson's *New Directions in Reading Instruction* has also been very helpful.

STUDY SKILLS

I never thought much about the way study skills should be taught before Michelle Simpson invited me to be part of a College Reading Association discussion of the subject (which took place during the 1980s). Obviously, I read what she suggested before I attended the discussion. I have been thinking about it since, and with this textbook, I hope that I have learned to integrate the study skills into the content. The issue, of course, is whether to teach the skills in isolation or as part of the content. I believe that using study skills on content that students are responsible for learning is more helpful than learning a skill in isolation.

Besides the work of Michelle Simpson and Sherri Nist, two books have greatly influenced my thinking about study skills: Rona F. Flippo and David C. Caverly's *Teaching Reading and Study Strategies at the College Level* and *College Reading and Study Strategy Programs*. I based my decision on which study skills to use for this textbook on information in these two books.

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Mary L. Dillard

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➤ Part I ◀

Introduction

The two-fold purpose of this book is to help the student pass developmental English exit exams and to help the student read textbooks for college-level courses. In order to do both, the student needs to improve in comprehension and vocabulary development. An added concern for most students is reading faster. Information below is presented in terms of my students' questions.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO HELP ME?

COMPREHENSION

To help the student improve in comprehension, I have designed a three-part reading plan based on schema theory and strategies other reading specialists have developed. In simple terms, the plan consists of what readers do before they read, while they read, and after they read. In *pre-reading*, readers take time to tap their experience and prior knowledge about the featured textbook chapter topic, predict what they will read, and overview the featured textbook chapter. This is a very different approach from the common one of opening a textbook and beginning to read on page one and reading straight through the chapter. While *reading* a selection from a textbook, readers will use Reciprocal Teaching or Active Questioning as strategies for remaining active and for improving understanding as they read. In Reciprocal Teaching, they will summarize, question on higher comprehension levels, clarify important ideas, and predict. In Active Questioning, they will work on three levels of comprehension: literal, inferential, and critical/creative. In *post-reading*, the readers will come full circle by comparing what they predicted they would read to what was actually read and by looking for areas of conflict between the two that would interfere with comprehension. They will connect what they learned to what they already know, and they will be able not only to state main ideas but to discuss the significance of them. They will also incorporate what they learn into their personal lives.

VOCABULARY

To help the student increase in vocabulary knowledge, I have devised several vocabulary exercises. At the beginning of each chapter a list of ten general vocabulary words is listed in a vocabulary/metacognitive exercise. Students measure whether or not they know the words and try to match the words with their definitions. At the end of the reading plan in each chapter, I have written vocabulary lessons that include work on affixes, meaning in context, recognition of multiple meanings of words, antonyms and synonyms, and sentence writing using the words. The last vocabulary exercise, Vocabulary Extension, is designed to help students become aware of how well they know the ten words they worked with in the previous exercises. They place the ten words in four different categories of knowing, write a paragraph using five of the words, and then complete a right-brain exercise on drawing what a word means. The exercise on levels of knowing a word was developed under the influence of the vocabulary work of Drs. Michelle L. Simpson and Sherri L. Nist of the University of Georgia and on the research of Dr. Norman A. Stahl of Northern Illinois University. Through the vocabulary exercises, the readers should become aware of how well they know new words, and the readers should be able to use these new words in their own writing and speech at some level of knowing.

READING FASTER

Many times students tell me after the first class that they can read okay; they just have to learn to read faster. For those readers concerned with improving reading rate, remember that you read with your brain, not just your eyes. The more prior knowledge, experience, and interest you bring to a reading selection, the more rapidly you will read. So work on developing interest in a variety of topics, read more than you have ever read before, and use every opportunity you have to learn something new if you seriously want to read faster. No quick fix exists. Reading faster by reading down the center of the page or reading only the important words are not linguistically sound approaches.

WHAT KIND OF MATERIAL IS IN THIS BOOK?

Each of the four chapters in Part I of this book contains a complete, reproduced textbook chapter, vocabulary and metacognitive exercises, a section on prior knowledge, academic study skills, a three-part reading plan, extended reading activities, and a section called reflection.

Part I of this book consists of four complete content-area chapters reproduced from authentic textbooks with appropriate reading exercises. The reading passages are long enough so that complex reading can take place; for example, these longer passages provide opportunities to use anaphoric and transition devices and to explore specialized vocabulary, complex text structure, and writing

patterns. Using the textbook chapters in their entirety also provides an opportunity to seek out the most important information in a variety of ways and to separate it from less important information. The four textbooks from which the reproduced chapters were taken are currently being used on many college campuses. In fact, you may be using one of them now if you are taking a computer, psychology, sociology, or geology course. Look for the textbooks in your campus bookstore the next time you are browsing there.

WHAT SUBJECTS ARE INCLUDED IN THE TEXTBOOK CHAPTERS?

COMPUTERS

The chapter on computers was chosen as the first one because most students will use computers in their classes regardless of their majors. Business, natural sciences, graphic arts, and engineering students may be more aware of computer use in their majors than others, but research will be conducted, papers written, and Powerpoint presentations will be made with the use of computers in most majors before a degree is granted. This chapter gives an overview of computers and is motivational. For those who fear computers, this chapter will help lessen that fear.

PSYCHOLOGY

Most students have some interest in psychology, at least at the level of pop psychology, and many will be required to take an introductory course as part of their core program or general studies. The psychology chapter was chosen with the idea in mind that freshmen often start to exert their individuality and redefine their positions within groups during the first year of college. Hopefully, this chapter will shed some light on these processes.

SOCIOLOGY

Freshmen are often living away from home for the first time and live in dorms or neighborhoods with a greater variety of people than in their hometown high schools or neighborhoods. The sociology chapter chosen for this part of the book contains the kind of information that can be useful in understanding or making friends with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The chapter will also help freshmen become aware of how complex and diverse our society is.

GEOLOGY

At the writing of this book, several environmental concerns are making national headlines, and this fact has influenced the choice of environmental geology as the chapter in natural sciences. The geology chapter provides a broad background to help the student make intelligent choices on environmental issues.

DO I HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING IN THIS BOOK?

Part I is written so that you have choices. You are not expected to do everything suggested in these chapters. You and your teacher will decide which exercises will provide the most help. For example, you are given two choices for a reading plan (Reciprocal Teaching or Active Questioning) to guide you through the chapter. The chapters alternate between Active Questioning and Reciprocal Teaching, with the unused plan placed in Appendix A. You are given a vocabulary lesson and a vocabulary extension exercise at the end of the lesson. You may decide to do only one, or you may decide to do parts of each.

Remember, what work you choose to do should help you improve your vocabulary or increase your comprehension. (Sometimes I have good students choose easy exercises rather than challenging ones because making high marks on the easy ones makes them feel good. High self-esteem is an important part of the learning process, but it should not be chosen over a chance to improve reading skills or learn something new. Self-esteem also comes from knowing you can do something that is a challenge for you.) Academic Study Skills exercises are placed near the beginning of each chapter to help guide you through the selected textbook chapter. They are a part of the first step in your three-part reading plan, pre-reading. The Academic Study Skills exercises in Part I focus on helping you use the textbook aids provided by the authors. Sometimes textbooks offer so much help that they seem cluttered and a reader with little background knowledge or experience or without the concepts upon which the information is based will find it difficult to find the important information. Therefore, the Textbook Study Aids Plan in the Academic Study Skills section in Part I offers guidance in separating the important information from the merely interesting information. You may choose to do these exercises, do some, or skip them if you feel you do not need them. The Extended Reading Activities at the end of the chapters are written to help you expand and deepen your knowledge of a subject in a variety of ways and to keep you reading. You have choices. With your teacher's help, decide what will help you improve your reading. The last part of each chapter, Reflection, contains my thoughts on the chapter, and I hope you find it helpful. A friend asked why I used the term *mind revolution* for the first section of Reflection. It comes from my own freshman-year experience. I stayed out of school for a year after graduating from high school, and I only went to college through an accident of fate. Luckily, my first courses were Greek drama and introductory courses in psychology and sociology. In those three courses I was presented with ideas I didn't know existed. Some I incorporated immediately, some sat cooking on a back burner of my brain, and some I rejected. The point is that I had something new to think about and it changed my perception of the world. Later I heard a story on a humanities recording about a student at Harvard. As he was getting ready to graduate, his adviser asked what his plans were. The student said he was going home to Georgia to plant corn. Shocked, his advisor asked why he had worked so hard for a Harvard degree. The student responded that he wanted something to think about while he planted corn. That story changed my perception of education. I have never given up looking for something new to think about, and I want the same experience for my students, hence, mind revolutions.

HOW AM I GOING TO LEARN HOW TO DO THE WORK?

For more years than I would want to count, I have been influenced by the work in content area reading of John E. Readence, David W. Moore, and Robert J. Rickelman. Their research introduced me to the idea of moving from teacher-directed work to teacher modeling, to guided practice, and then to student independence. The reading plans in Part I's four chapters use this progression. The first two reading plans ask the student to answer teacher-made questions (dependence level). The last two move to a combination of teacher-made questions and guided practice. Independence comes in Part II. The above reading authorities have also influenced my inclusion of exercises based on having and activating prior knowledge, predicting, connecting new information to old, following an author's organizational patterns, and student questioning on higher comprehension levels. Because you will be moving from teacher dependency to independence gradually, you will not feel dumb. You will learn how to improve your comprehension and vocabulary in a challenging but non-threatening way.



Computers: Information Technology in Perspective

Overview

- Vocabulary/Metacognition
- Pre-Reading the Textbook Chapter
 - Tapping Prior Knowledge
 - Predicting
 - Overviewing
- Prior Knowledge
 - Writing Pattern Overview
 - Directions for Reading This Section
 - Chapter Sections
- Academic Study Skills
 - Overview
 - Textbook Study Aids Plan
- Reciprocal Teaching
 - Overview
 - General Directions
 - Assignment
- Post-Reading the Textbook Chapter
 - Overview
 - Assignment
- Textbook Chapter: "Information Technology in Perspective"
- Vocabulary Lesson
- Vocabulary Extension