Mastering COLLEGE READING

Theodore O. Knight

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Preface

No matter what the subject, effective college-level learning is determined to a large extent by a student's effectiveness as an independent, critical reader. Having been accustomed to the close support and guidance of a teacher during the earlier phases of their education, college students are often initially unprepared to read and absorb on their own the large quantities of written information they are routinely assigned.

A great deal is expected of college readers: Not only must they read difficult material independently and fully comprehend its content. They are also expected to interpret what they read and to decide how to use it for their own educational purposes. Finally, they are expected to think critically about what they read—to judge or evaluate content and reasoning, to incorporate what they read into their own thinking, and to apply what they have read to further reading and study.

Mastering College Reading will help students to master their college reading assignments by teaching the skills they need in order to read effectively and efficiently. The lessons and exercises in this text are designed to help students to move from literal comprehension—that is, an understanding of the information as it appears on the page—to interpretive and critical comprehension—that is, the ability to form new ideas based on what they read and to judge or evaluate the information they receive through reading.

What Benefits Will Students Gain from This Book?

Learning how to read effectively and efficiently is an important key to college success. Unless students are able to independently master the material they are required to read, they are at a severe disadvantage.

- Students will develop and expand their reading comprehension skills by understanding the relationship between the form and the content of what they read.
- Students will learn to identify the four basic forms of nonfiction writing and how to read each of them most effectively.
- A student's purpose as the reader of a particular piece of writing
 may not always coincide exactly with the writer's original purpose
 in writing it. Students will learn to fully understand what the
 writer has to communicate and to grasp what they need to learn to
 fulfill their own purposes as readers.
- Effective reading includes comprehending what a writer suggests
 or implies as well as what is stated directly. Students will learn how
 to interpret what they read.
- Students will learn how to read and think critically—how to judge and evaluate what they read.
- Finally, students will apply the full range of skills they have learned to actual full-length reading selections, all relating to one of the many elements of the college experience.

Who Can Use This Book?

Mastering College Reading is for students in developmental reading courses in community colleges, four-year schools, and career schools. It is designed for students who are proceeding directly into a program from high school as well as for older students who are returning to school. This text can also be used in reading classes, learning centers, skills labs, and communications classes.

Mastering College Reading is written for students who feel they lack the reading skills needed for college learning. The text is designed to provide lessons in the full range of important higher-level comprehension skills needed for student success.

How to Use This Book

The lessons in *Mastering College Reading* provide instruction in a series of increasingly sophisticated reading skills, beginning with word decoding skills and basic comprehension, going on to skills in interpretation, and concluding with critical reading and thinking skills. For most students, the lessons and exercises should be studied in the order in which they are presented in the book. Students using this text in a learning center or skills lab may find that their instructor wishes to assign only selected appropriate skills lessons.

Preface v

Each lesson in Parts 1 through 4 of this book contains short exercises. The exercises in Parts 2 through 4 consist of one or more reading selections a few paragraphs long, followed by a variety of questions. The questions that follow the exercise selections are designed to reinforce the particular skill taught in that lesson.

Part 5 of *Mastering College Reading* is a collection of reading selections of various lengths, all relating to one of the many elements of the college experience. Each selection is followed by questions and activities designed to encourage students to apply the skills they have learned in the earlier lessons. The questions following each selection are short answer or multiple choice and are designed to be completed by all students. The Reading and Thinking Critically activities that follow the questions call for more extended and varied responses. Some are appropriate for homework assignments. Many can form the basis for class discussions, group work, or in-class assignments. It is not intended that all students do all the activities following each selection.

The questions and activities following the reading selections draw on all of the skills taught in the lessons in the earlier parts. Most instructors will want students to complete all the lessons in Parts 1 through 4 before assigning the selections in Part 5.

Theodore O. Knight

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To the Student

One of the first things that most students discover about their college studies is the large amount of reading and studying they are expected to do. College instructors usually expect a minimum of two hours of study time for every hour of class time. Surveys show that the average college course requires about 80 pages of outside reading per week. Lectures, discussions, writing and problem-solving assignments, laboratory, shop, and field-work assignments all have a significant part to play in your college education; but if you cannot read effectively, you are operating under a major handicap.

Learning to read well is a long-term process. For most of us, formal instruction in reading ended after the first few years in elementary school. As your education has progressed, however, the material you want to read has become longer and more complex. To continue to fully understand what you read, you have probably found that you must constantly hone and add to your skills as a reader. You have also probably found that fully comprehending what you read means *thinking* about it in ways that you did not before. College reading requires you to respond to what you read in a variety of ways: You must fully understand the content of what you read, of course. But in classes in many subjects you are also expected to interpret and analyze both the information presented and the style and structure the writer uses to present that information. You are often expected to evaluate the accuracy and usefulness of the material you read. And you are frequently expected to develop your own thoughts based upon what you read.

Look at the chart that follows and ask yourself which column describes you as a reader.

Effective Reader

- You figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words using the context, word analysis, or the dictionary.
- As you read, the writer's ideas connect with one another and make sense.
- You can see where the writer is going.
- You know why you are reading the material.
- You can express the major ideas in the material in your own words.

Ineffective Reader

- You skip over or ignore unfamiliar words.
- You don't see how some ideas connect with others. Some details seem completely unconnected.
- You can't predict where the writer is going.
- You don't know why you are reading the material or you can't tell what it has to do with what you need to learn.
- To summarize what you have read, you need to reread and repeat the writer's words.

This book has two important things to teach you.

First, you will discover that effective reading—especially reading of college-level material—is an activity which you, as the reader, must actively control and direct. Effective reading is as much about what goes on in your mind as you read as it is about your basic understanding of the words and sentences as they are printed on the page. It's about remembering what you read a few paragraphs or many pages ago and connecting it to what you are reading now. It's about exploring the relationship between your own knowledge and experience and the new knowledge and experiences the writer is communicating to you.

Second, and equally as important, you will learn that reading effectively is not a single activity which is always done in the same way. You must use different skills to read different kinds of written material. This book is designed to teach you how to actively control and direct your reading in order to learn well. It will also teach you how to recognize different kinds of reading material and how to apply the appropriate skills for reading whatever you are assigned in your college courses.

Your goal as a student is to read effectively—to completely understand and to apply the information and ideas contained in what you have read—in other words, to learn. To be completely effective as a reader, you must be able to go beyond a basic understanding of what you read. You must be able to interpret what you read, to analyze what the writer has given you and combine it with what you already know. Finally, you must also be able to evaluate what you read. You must know how to apply clear thinking and good judgment in determining the accuracy of

To the Student xi

what you read and its usefulness for your educational purposes. *Mastering College Reading* is designed to teach you all of these higher-level comprehension skills.

An Effective Attitude toward Reading

The first key to effective college reading is your own awareness of yourself as a reader *while you are reading*. In any piece of writing the author writes with a purpose in mind. In order to learn, you must read with your own purpose in mind. A writer adopts certain forms and strategies in order to achieve a purpose. As a reader, you must understand these forms and strategies and then apply the appropriate skills in order to effectively read what the writer has written.

Compare the following characteristics that identify an effective reader with your own attitude as a reader:

Alertness: An alert reader pays constant, close attention to both what a writer is saying and how it is being said. In order to master your college reading assignments, you must become a close reader. Reading closely doesn't mean reading slowly or focusing great attention on each and every word of the material. Reading closely means that you must actively and intensively apply your thought and attention to the material. You must think about every aspect of what the writer is saying. And you must consider what the writer has left unstated but expects you to understand anyway.

Flexibility: A flexible reader has a broad range of reading and thinking skills and applies the appropriate ones, depending on what the writer is saying and how it is being said.

Independence: Although alertness and flexibility contribute to making you a good reader, to be truly effective as a reader you must exercise your own reasoning abilities and your own critical judgment. You must weigh the facts and opinions offered by the writer. You must evaluate the evidence the writer offers to support his or her statements. And, finally, you must think for yourself about the topic, whatever it may be.

Effective Reading Skills

The second key to effective reading is the development of reading skills that directly deal with the particular form and content of the material you are required to read. All written material takes one of four broad forms—

or is a mixture of several of these forms—depending on the writer's purpose in writing. If you understand and can identify these forms in what you read, then you have one key to reading them effectively. This book will help you learn and develop the skills you must master to effectively deal with the entire range of reading material you will encounter, whatever your program of studies may be.

Effective reading is a big task, and reading effectively is a vital learning skill in all areas of college study—and ultimately in all careers and professions. The goal of this book is to teach you the mental attitude and the comprehension, interpretation, and thinking skills that are essential if you are to master the reading required in college courses. Effective reading is based on only a small number of attitudes and skills. If you study the lessons in this book, complete the exercises, and apply what you learn in reading the selections in Part 5, you will have the tools you need to read and learn successfully.

Contents

PART 1

Vocabulary

Introduction 3
General Vocabulary and Subject Vocabulary 3
Levels of Vocabulary 4
Using Context Clues 4
Four Kinds of Context Clues 5
Analysis of Word Parts 10
Using the Dictionary 16
The Dictionary as a Tool 17
Putting Your Dictionary to Good Use 18

Part 2

Understanding What You Read

Introduction 23
Writer's Purpose 24
Topic, Audience, and Ideas 25
Main Idea and Supporting Details 28
Writer's Use of Language 31
Four Modes of Written Expression 34
Description 34
Narrative 38
Exposition 46
Persuasion 46
Reader's Purpose 59

PART 3

Interpreting What You Read

Introduction 65
Distinguishing between Fact and Opinion 66
Recognizing Cause-and-Effect 71
Complex Cause and Effect Relationships 73
Remote or Indirect Causes or Effects 73
Multiple Causes and a Single Effect 73
Single Cause and Multiple Effects 74
Multiple Causes and Multiple Effects 74
Mistaken Cause-and-Effect Relationships 74
Interpreting Writers' Use of Language 76
Figurative Language 76
Style and Tone 81
Drawing Conclusions 87
Drawing Inferences 91

PART 4

Reading and Thinking Critically

Introduction 97
Reading with Questions in Mind 97
Thinking Critically about Facts and Opinions 98
Criteria for Evaluating Fact Statements 99
Criteria for Evaluating Opinion Statements 101
Bias 104
Thinking Critically about Appeals to Reason 109
Appeals to Reason 109
Recognizing Faulty Reasoning 112
Applying Research, Personal Knowledge, and the Evidence of Your Own Senses 118
Thinking Critically about Appeals to Emotions 123
Disguised Appeals to Emotions 126
Dishonest Appeals to Emotions 127
Thinking Critically about Conclusions and Inferences 131

Contents XV

PART 5

Readings

Introduction 139

Making College Pay Off 141

Adele Scheele

Democracy's Colleges 150

Joannie M. Schroff

It Is Greek to Me 158

Jeanie Marie Neilsson

The College of Tomorrow 163

Mel Elfin

Making the Most of Your Time 170

Dan Kelly

Standing Up, Speaking Out, Fighting Back 175

Cathryn Jakobson

Parent Trap: The Folks Are Coming . . . The Folks Are Coming 185 Dan Kelly

E-Mail Accesses the World 191

Robert Lee James

Too Many Campuses Want to Sweep Student Plagiarism Under the Rug 201

Edward M. White

College Clash: Fight for Your Right . . . To Study. . . To Party 207 Rory Evans and Eric Zicklin

Gays on Campus 214 Stephanie Mansfield

Speech Impediment 223

Laurence R. Stains

Useless U? 236

Jacob Weisberg

A Winner's Secret 243

John Feinstein

Does a Real Solution Exist? 251

Elizabeth Lee and Erin Einborn

Non-Traditional Addictions: When Norman Isn't Normal 260 Elizabeth Roch

Best News Ever for Working Women 266

Eugenie Allen

Graduating by Year 2000 276

Vicki Spina

Credits 283

Index 286

Mastering College Reading

words context

Vocabulary

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1 Vocabulary

Introduction

There is nothing more fundamental to becoming an effective reader than building a good vocabulary. In order to build an effective reading vocabulary, as you read you need to be constantly aware of words and their many shades of meaning. The more you understand the power of words and how they are used, the more effective your reading will be.

General Vocabulary and Subject Vocabulary

There are two kinds of words you need to become familiar with as a student if you want to read and learn effectively. A **general vocabulary** is made up of words that everyone should become thoroughly familiar with, no matter what they are reading or studying. A **subject vocabulary** is made up of the specialized words that relate to the particular subject you are studying. For example, *optimum*, *mediate*, and *gestate* are words that should be in your general vocabulary. *Titrate*, however, is a word that you would need to know if you were studying chemistry, and a *writ* is something that you would learn about if you were studying law.

Subject vocabulary words are best learned through memory and frequent use. Here is a technique many successful students use to learn new subject vocabulary words: When you encounter an unfamiliar new term in your reading, immediately write it on one side of a small index card or slip of paper. On the other side, write down the definition of the word. (If you cannot find the definition of the word in the material you are reading, there are special subject dictionaries for most areas of college study. The reference section of your school or local library is the place to look for subject dictionaries.)