IMPROVING COLLEGE READING

LEE A. JACOBUS



SIXTH EDITION



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I M P R O V I N G COLLEGE READING



The sixth edition of *Improving College Reading* differs from its earlier editions in two important ways. First, not all of the selections are new to this edition. Some, at the suggestion of users of the book, have been retained from the previous edition. Most of the selections in "Section Two: Readings in Anthropology, Ecology, and Survival," "Section Three: Readings in Sociology," and "Section Four: Readings in Science" are new to this edition. Most of the selections in "Section Five: Readings from Popular First-Year Textbooks" are carried over from the previous edition.

Second, this edition contains a new section, "Section One: Introduction: How to Read College-Level Material," which addresses four important issues:

- ◆ Success in college reading, which treats essential information about reading for comprehension, using the dictionary, and developing a larger vocabulary
- ◆ Strategies for reading, which analyzes headings, subheadings, paragraphs, and paragraph structure in an effort to guide the reader through college-level material
- ◆ Metacognitive strategies, which introduces concepts of alertness, reading awareness, reading goals, and the SQ3R reading technique
- ◆ Using the testing material, which familiarizes readers with the varieties of questions used in the testing apparatus.

The collection of passages in *Improving College Reading*, Sixth Edition, covers a representative range of academic disciplines encountered by the average first- or second-year student in college. The focus is on the kind of reading every college student must do to succeed in an academic program. The interest level of these pieces is naturally high, but the intellectual demands are high as well. The aim is to prepare students for college reading by training them to read attentively, to improve concentration and retention, and to translate those abilities into skills necessary for analyzing a passage for its main ideas, supporting evidence, and principal interpretations. The testing material concentrates on developing vocabulary, isolating important ideas, and drawing appropriate

conclusions. The testing material moves from the most basic to the most advanced cognitive skill levels.

I have used Benjamin Bloom's evaluation techniques in my testing. Questions test for memory and understanding, application and analysis, and synthesis and evaluation. For examining the reading levels of the selections, I have relied on the useful computer program developed by Michael Schuyler, which permits comparison of all the major readability formulas currently available. Naturally, I verified the reading levels for each passage by my own analysis.

Those who have used the earlier editions will find enough similarity with past practice to feel familiar with the book. But they will also see that some useful additions in discussing reading strategies may save them some classroom time.

I would like to thank my editors at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Stephen Jordan and Mary K. Bridges. I am also grateful to Dr. Rose Quiello, who aided in practical editorial matters regarding permissions and who helped compose segments of the testing material. Her work was indispensable to this edition. Thanks also to Linda Arnold of the University of Central Arkansas, Dennis Gabriel of Cuyahoga Community College, and Jacqueline Stark of Los Angeles Valley College for their suggestions. As always, I would like to remember the late Matthew Milan, my first editor at HBJ, and always a constant friend.

As in past editions, I would like to dedicate this book to the teachers and students who will use it. My hope is that it will help them open worlds of learning and accomplishment.

Lee A. Jacobus

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*INTRODUCTION:

HOW TO READ
COLLEGE MATERIAL

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Success in College Reading

Reading to learn is not the same as reading for fun. When you read for fun, you do not care whether you remember what you have read or whether you can use the information from your reading. We sometimes call reading for fun "escapist" reading because it takes us out of ourselves and our immediate circumstances. However, reading to learn is not escapist, even though it is sometimes fun in its own right. Learning something is satisfying because people are naturally curious. Therefore reading to learn usually provides us with a sense of satisfaction when we feel we have gotten something out of the experience.

Every college course has a textbook or series of books. Every meeting of a class requires you to have read material for that meeting. As you go through the semester, you develop more and more understanding of the course material in direct proportion to your comprehension and retention of your reading.

Retention is dependent on several things. One is a good memory. Some readers have prodigious memories and can recall books they have read for many years. In secondary school such people rarely take notes or worry about recalling what they have read. However, in college the ante is raised so high that even those with excellent memories find themselves overwhelmed. For that reason, every college bookstore sells notebooks. These notebooks are not only intended for taking notes in the classroom—they also do excellent service in taking notes from your reading.

For the readings in this book, separate notes are probably not as useful as comments in the margins — annotations that highlight the major points, the key details, the ideas you want to have at your fingertips. Along with annotations in the margins, underlining or highlighting important passages and details will help you survey the reading selections later and bring most of their meaning back into memory with great efficiency. College reading demands efficiency and planning. The reading load is so great that without efficiency you will wear yourself out just trying to keep up. This book will help make you a more efficient reader by focusing your attention and providing training in the skills that good readers develop as they read.

Reading for Comprehension Comprehension comes first in college reading. Retention comes second. Reasoning from what you have read comes third. Of course, reasoning from what you have read is the most important of these three activities, but it comes third because it is totally dependent on the first two. You cannot derive many conclusions or draw many inferences from your reading if you do not understand it well or if you cannot keep it in mind. The exercise materials following each of the reading passages in this book are designed to build comprehension and retention, using a variety of familiar testing instruments. Your purposes may vary from passage to passage, and you may therefore

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decide to use the exercises in different ways. You will develop your reading skills no matter how you use the material — providing that you do use it.

Beginning with Words All reading begins with words. Knowing the vocabulary of any given discipline is the first step in becoming conversant with the ideas of the discipline. The more you read in sociology, history, and sciences, the easier the material becomes. The reason: your familiarity with the vocabulary increases proportionately with your reading. On the other hand, it is not especially helpful to master the vocabulary of, say, biology apart from your study and reading about biology. Vocabulary out of context of the study of the subject is arid, useless, and impossible to remember.

Why Vocabulary Is Important Beginning readers develop a skill called word recognition. It takes time to learn words, but once people do so their skill at reading increases rapidly. In a college course, specific terms will guide you through the material. For example, in the study of literature you will confront specialized terms such a allegory, symbol, metaphor, characterization, dramatic irony, reversal, theme, and style. Every college discipline has its own collection of such terms. Mastering them as you meet them is one of the best strategies for avoiding confusion and increasing your chances for success in the discipline.

There are two kinds of vocabulary that college readers need to consider closely. One is the specialized vocabulary of the discipline. Each vocabulary is peculiar to its discipline and will be treated more specifically in the last section of this book: Readings in Firstyear Textbooks. The other is the formal general vocabulary that is common to many disciplines. Most people use an informal everyday vocabulary. But writers of college-level reading material ordinarily use a more formal, more specific, and more accurate vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to many people. If you review the vocabulary exercises, you will see that they emphasize a combination of the specific discipline-related vocabulary and a more general vocabulary which could be used in the course of other discussions. In each case, the words chosen for definition and examination are words that will be important to you as a student in college no matter what your own discipline of study may be.

Learn Words in Context, Not in Lists Knowing words is a function of long-term memory. You have known the meaning of words such as *memory*, *helpfulness*, and *superb* virtually forever. There were only a few years in your life that you did not know these words. They are in long-term memory. However, words that are unfamiliar to you now, such as *eidetic*, *paradigm*, and *replicate* must be learned. Unless you use them daily, your only hope for remembering them is to keep them in short-term memory. You can expect to lose their meaning in a given period of time—a week, a month, a semester, or a quarter. If they become

part of your everyday speech, they will then be part of your long-term memory. You will soon discover that your most important interests, depending on your career goals, will dictate which words you keep in long-term memory and which you will lose.

Your immediate concern is how to learn new words. The most satisfactory way is to learn them in the context of their normal use. One of the least satisfactory ways is to learn them in lists (or on flash cards) apart from their context in your reading. That is not to say lists and flash cards do not work. Indeed, for some people and in certain situations they work well. But unless a word is learned in context and becomes part of long-term memory, such techniques are stopgap measures.

It pays to guess at the meaning of a word in context. On the other hand, if you know your guess is probably wrong, or if you know the word is of such importance that you cannot rely on a guess, then the dictionary is the next best means by which to learn the word. Most authors you will read know when a word or term is likely to be known by only a few readers, and therefore they use such unfamiliar words in a way which defines them within the context of the sentence.

The meaning of some words is difficult to guess out of context: frenetic, dogmatic, truculent, bourgeois, lethargic. But consider these words in appropriate contexts:

- 1. The rapid pace of life in Rio de Janeiro made Luís so <u>frenetic</u> that when he was there he hardly knew which way to turn or what to do first.
- 2. Podrevich was open-minded about educational styles and classroom design, but he was absolutely <u>dogmatic</u> in his teaching about the political ideals of the nation's founders.
- 3. Neesha struggled to contain herself and not leave the office immediately; she had never realized anyone could become so <u>truculent</u> and hostile so quickly as Maria Di Nardo did when she thought she had been insulted.
- 4. Forché Du Mont explained that he would not socialize with us because we were hopelessly <u>bourgeois</u> and unimaginative in our attitudes toward the homeless.
- 5. Sylvia at first thought the Lucas family suffered from a hereditary <u>lethargy</u>, but she discovered that their lack of energy and inability to become involved or excited was caused by a severe protein imbalance.

The contexts help clarify the general meanings of the words. Frenetic means frantic, overwrought. Dogmatic could mean stubborn in this context, but it really means exact and unvarying in thought and idea; someone who teaches dogmatically would not have much interest in contrary ideas because the dogmatist believes that his or her ideas are the only correct ones. Someone is truculent when she is willing to fight; linking truculent and hostile in that sentence helps clarify the meaning of the word. Bourgeois means smugly

middle-class; someone who is *bourgeois* would have little or no imagination and would be very self-satisfied. *Lethargy* means lack of energy; the context of the sentence provides the definition, as is often the case.

Using the Dictionary Many times the context of the sentence will not provide an adequate guide to the meaning of the word. The author may expect you to know the word's meaning and will not, therefore, provide a contextual clue or definition. Or, you may have begun reading in the middle of a book or chapter in which the contextual definition was provided earlier. In either case, you will need to consult a dictionary for the meaning. A small pocket-sized dictionary will usually be fine. However, when you look up a word and find its definition, you should always write the definition in the margin near the word. In some cases, you will be able to include such new words in your long-term vocabulary; but in many others you will not. In either case, writing in the definition will save you the job of looking the word up again later.

Examples

- 1. A few drops of vinegar in a petri dish have an <u>aperient</u> effect on tiny clams or shellfish.
- 2. When he filled his peace pipe and took long puffs from it, Chief Joseph's speech turned sage and gnomic.
- 3. The <u>inclement</u> weather was so unexpected that the first team scaling the glacier was taken totally by surprise.

In none of these instances does the context help us understand the underlined words. When you read these sentences, you might be tempted to gloss over the words and read on hoping to get the general gist of things. Sometimes that approach to reading is all right. All three of these words have roots in ancient languages: *aperient* and *inclement* are from Latin; *gnomic* is from Greek. Most readers would probably need a dictionary to know the meaning of these words. The dictionary would tell you that all three words are adjectives (they describe a noun or pronoun); *aperient* can also be a noun.

a • pe' • ri • ent adj. having a laxative effect. n. a laxative. gno' • mic adj. possessed of wisdom; wise; aphoristic; related to a writer of aphorisms or wise sayings. in • clem' • ent adj. unpleasant; harsh; stormy.

None of these words is technical or limited to the vocabulary of any academic discipline or any profession. All are in general usage, although the first two are relatively unusual. Weather commentators use *inclement* reluctantly, but often enough so that you may be familiar with it. The important point is that the meaning of none of these words, as they appear in their original sentence, could be figured out from the context in which they appear.

Exercises

Guessing at Meanings If You Do Not Know Them You will not always have a dictionary with you when you read. Therefore, it is important to study contexts carefully, looking for cues that will help you make sense of unfamiliar words. The overall meaning of the sentence will tell you a great deal about the word. *Inclement*, as it is used in its sentence, obviously applies to the weather and means either something good or something bad. The prefix *in*- usually (but not always) implies that something is bad, or if not bad somehow deficient and lacking in something important (for example, inaudible, indefensible). Those cues would help you guess that the word implied bad weather. The following exercises are useful for getting you started with examining words and contexts. These samples come from the material you will read later in this book.

1.	contact with local people who might. Your guess at the meaning from the context:
	Dictionary definition if necessary:
2.	A new <u>urban</u> African-American culture was evolving with its own literature, art, and music. Your guess at the meaning from the context:
	Dictionary definition if necessary:
3.	Implication became reality in 1975 with the discovery of the first in-house, or endogenous, opiate. Your guess at the meaning from the context:
	Dictionary definition if necessary:
4.	Implication became reality in 1975 with the discovery of the first in-house, or endogenous, opiate. Your guess at the meaning from the context:

Dictionary definition if necessary: __