

University of Oum El-Bouaghi

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Department of English

READING TEXTS

A course elaborated for the **second** semester of second year LMD classes' requirements

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Disclaimer: This course is mostly a collection of materials from a variety of sources (see list of references). All merit is the authors' credit. It has been designed for the teaching of Reading Texts subject at the University of Oum El-Bouaghi.

Content:

- 1. Higher order thinking skills**
- 2. Information synthesis**
- 3. Responding to a text**

1. Higher order thinking skills

When comprehension is deep and thorough, a reader is able to process text at higher levels of the thinking process. The reader is able to apply **the levels of Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy (1956)** and make meaning at more sophisticated levels. This thread is reading at the *evaluation, synthesis, analysis, and interpretation* levels. Good readers can monitor their own comprehension, interpret charts and graphs while reading, summarize as they read, make connections while reading, and process text after reading at sophisticated levels of thinking. Finally, good readers can remember and discuss in depth what they have read.

Evaluating information means being able to distinguish essential information or core concepts from what is simply interesting. It also means being able to discern a theme, form an opinion, or develop a perspective based on the information presented. Evaluation is the ability to make judgments about ideas and concepts being read.

Synthesizing information means taking new information and combining it with existing information to construct a new idea, a new way of thinking, or a totally new product or creation. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) tell us that "synthesizing is the strategy that allows readers to change their thinking." Synthesis is the ability to apply ideas and concepts in new ways. It is the ability to put two concepts together in a new way to form new thoughts, conclusions, or ideas.

Analyzing information allows readers to make comparisons with the information in their background knowledge. These comparisons allow readers to make generalizations about the information they have read so that they can form judgments

and opinions. Analysis is the ability to combine a reader's background information and life experiences with new ideas or concepts to pull apart the information or concepts.

Interpretation is giving one's own "slant" or meaning to the ideas or concepts. Readers must take information from their background knowledge and make comparisons with known information to construct or "interpret" the information in a logical, analytical way. Advanced readers **must be able to infer** both implicit and explicit meanings. Readers can find and identify "*hidden meanings*" or symbols by linking what is known to the information they are reading. Interpretation takes analysis one step higher by requiring that the reader not only form opinions and judgments but also be able to cite viable evidence or proof from the work to justify a stance.

Reading expert Laura Robb (2000) advises that students "need to be taught the complex strategies that enable them to appreciate the nuances of **mood, tone, and theme** in books. They need to be guided to make deeper *text-to-text connections*, so they can relate the elements and themes of one book to other books, to their community, and their world."

When practicing reading application in the real world, we use all of these higher-order skills to approach the reading that we do on a daily basis. As Richard Allington (2001) points out, we do not usually ask our friends to recall specific information from a novel they have read or a magazine article that we have shared with them. What adults generally do is ask others for *responses, reactions, and evaluations* of various ideas or information. We ask for our friend's opinions on the morning's lead news stories or his or her analysis of the latest trends on Wall Street, or we ask a co-worker for their interpretation of a controversial article in our favorite magazine. We discuss novels we have both read and we ask our friends to discuss the perspective of a writer or the

actions of particular characters. Despite the fact that this is how adults process written information, in school we often present artificial passages with little meaning or interest to students and ask them to answer questions about this material. Because this is not how we process reading in our own lives, why is this what we expect our students to do?

We need to engage students in our classrooms in as much “**authentic**” and **purposeful reading** and discussion as possible. Thinking needs to go beyond where the typical classroom now goes. We need to go beyond the basal readers to engage students in thinking and processing text at the highest of levels. To be prepared for today’s high-tech, fast-paced world, students must be able to *grasp difficult ideas*, *analyze sources* for reliability, and *process many sources* of information. Students must be able to analyze, synthesize, interpret, and apply the information they have available to them. Our students need to become literate “processors” of text who are able to use their higher-level skills to think, evaluate, analyze, synthesize, and make interpretations of what they are reading.

Duke and Pearson (2002) outlined **six strategies** that higher-level readers use to make meaning of text as they read. Those strategies are **(1) prediction/activation** of prior knowledge, **(2) using think-aloud** strategies to monitor comprehension, **(3) using text structures**, **(4) using and constructing visual models** such as graphic organizers and imagery, **(5) summarizing**, and **(6) questioning and answering** questions while reading.

Let’s examine each of these strategies in greater detail. Rosenblatt (1968) demonstrated that readers use their prior knowledge, information, and experiences to make meaning from text as they read. He stated that it is this background that affects a

reader's ability to comprehend the author's work. Minsky (1975) and Anderson (1984) later named this concept "**schema theory.**" According to schema theory, each person brings a set of unique experiences and knowledge, known as "**schemata,**" to the reading experience. Students with limited experiences and background knowledge have difficulty making connections to the reading and the material being presented. Because background is important to the reading process, we must ensure that students have the proper background knowledge prior to reading a new text.

Thinking aloud as one processes text is one of the most critical elements to building strong, higher-level reading skills. Encourage students to approach the reading of text material by making predictions about the material, testing the hypothesis made, and then realigning thinking as the reading progresses if the text does not match the reader's anticipated progression. Model text processing so developing readers can hear your rationale as you read the text. This strategy should be used with all ages to demonstrate to students how good readers handle each aspect of text. Highly effective readers possess the ability to identify what is important in the text. Readers who understand the purpose of their reading are better able to distinguish relevant from irrelevant information in text. We must ensure that students are clear on the purpose of the reading so that they learn to use this information to guide their attention while reading. Researchers Billmeyer and Barton (1998) state, "How well a reader comprehends a text is also dependent on **metacognition:** his ability to think about and to control his thinking process before, during, and after reading."

Effective readers synthesize and summarize text in their heads as they read. The process involves determining the main idea of the passage and then relating the important key points that support and expand the main idea. At the beginning reading

levels, the foundation of this skill is expressed as the ability to retell key facts or events from the text. At higher levels, students must be able to eliminate irrelevant or repeated information, categorize information into lists, form opinions, make comparisons, and make connections between points and details. Students must be able to take notes, outline the key points, and synthesize and summarize information in the material they have read.

Higher-level readers must also learn to analyze text and draw inferences from the text. Calkins (2001) calls this “reading between the lines” and “reading beyond the lines” to determine a character’s motivation, personality traits, and story themes. Successful readers must be able to identify logical sequence and use the context to make logical arguments with supporting evidence from the text. Successful readers also must be able to identify author style, the method of developing the story and the characters, and interpret meaning through a character’s perspective.

Visualization techniques and graphic organizers help students sort out relationships and see the connections present in the text. We must help students learn to make these connections, analyze information, and support opinions and statements with text links. Effective readers modify their reading rate and self-monitor comprehension.

Proficient readers have strategies to use when meaning is lost while reading. Less-able readers, by contrast, frequently skip over difficult portions of the text or unknown words while reading. This action leaves them less able to recall or comprehend what they have read. Proficient readers have a good grasp of vocabulary and word meaning. They can identify vocabulary and word meanings at abstract levels such as with idiomatic or metaphoric language. They have good word attack skills and know how to

use context clues, rhyme patterns, or word parts (prefix, suffix, affix, root words) to make predictions about the meaning of unknown words they encounter. For this reason, we must help students learn “fix-up” comprehension strategies (Pogrow, 1993; Caverly, Mandeville, & Nicholson, 1995) and ensure that vocabulary development is stressed with students in all areas of the curriculum.

Proficient readers pose questions before, during, and after reading. Questions help drive understanding and link old knowledge with new knowledge through analysis and synthesis. Modeling and using think aloud strategies can help proficient readers expand their use of questioning while reading. Predicting is an early form of questioning that even the youngest of readers can be taught to use while reading.

Questioning allows readers to sort out what they already know about a topic from what they still need to get from the text. It helps readers explain and justify their opinions and organize logical arguments as they read.

Critical readers make connections while reading. They analyze what they are reading and synthesize the information in new ways. We must move beyond traditional “answer the questions at the back of the chapter” strategies in the classroom if we are to prepare students to be effective, literate readers. We must help students stretch and grow as questioning, thinking readers.

2. Information synthesis

Perhaps the most essential, and certainly one of the most complex research skills, is the ability to synthesize information. One researcher, J.D. Johnson (2009) writes: “...the ability for people to assimilate information they find into coherent personal strategies is perhaps the critical modern survival skill” (p. 601). Information synthesis is the process of analyzing and evaluating information from various sources, making connections between the information found, and combining the recently acquired information with prior knowledge to create something new. Information synthesis strategies are essential skills. Without them, we cannot derive new knowledge from these large amounts of data (Larsen, Wactlar & Friedlander, 2003; National Science Board, 2005). Effective information synthesis is also vital in developing effective writing and communication skills to share new knowledge. Coherent information synthesis is, therefore, required to productively participate in and contribute to our information-rich society. Yet college students have difficulty analyzing and synthesizing different pieces of information (Howard, Serviss, & Rodrigue, 2010).

Information synthesis most commonly appears in the education literature as a level in the original Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning Domains (Bloom, 1956). This Taxonomy is a classification for understanding student learning and to promote higher forms of educational thinking. The Taxonomy is often depicted as a pyramid with the higher forms of thinking at the top. For understanding the cognitive domain of learning, the Taxonomy builds upon steps beginning with factual knowledge and moving to comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Synthesis, ranked second from the top in the original Taxonomy, is considered one of the most

important goals in the field of education. Here, synthesis is defined as the building of structures or patterns from a variety of elements with emphasis on creating some new meaning or a new structure from the elements. Some of the keywords involved in synthesis include: combine, create, design, and summarize. In Krathwohl's (2002) revision of Bloom's Taxonomy, the original categories were renamed and their definitions revised to represent more active thinking. Synthesis was renamed to "create" and changed places with "evaluation" as the top category in the domain. The create category is defined as putting together elements to make a whole, including the elements of generating, planning, and producing.

2.1. The role of synthesis in text comprehension

Information synthesis can be seen in the area of text comprehension, specifically in multiple-source comprehension (also known as multiple document processing, or intertextuality). Historically, text comprehension research involved single-document comprehension; this was not extended to multiple texts until the 1990s when Wineburg (1991) studied how novices and experts reasoned about a historical event using multiple documents. Using think-aloud protocols Wineburg identified the strategies people used to come to a conclusion. More researchers followed (see Stadtler & Bromme, 2013 for details), resulting in a better understanding of the various strategies employed when processing multiple documents (e.g. Perfetti, Rouet, & Britt, 1999). According to Goldman and Scardamalia (2013), to be successful at synthesizing information from multiple documents, students need to be taught content knowledge, source expertise, and an understanding of how knowledge is created in the field of study. Once these are in place students can evaluate information, integrate it into existing belief structures, and create new knowledge. Both Jucks and Paus (2013) and

Goldman and Scardamalia (2013) note the social aspect of creating meaning, and they emphasize the use of discussion when teaching multiple-document processing in general and the resolution of conflicting information between documents.

3. Responding to a text

A text response is a style of writing in which you share your reaction to something. It is an opportunity to let the audience know how you feel about something. It is also referred to as a reader response which is a specific response to a specific text.

A text response by definition is specifically a response to a book you have read but it can also be a response to a film you have watched, a game you have been playing, or for more mature students it could be a response to a decision the government is making that affects you or your community that you have read from a newspaper or website.

How to respond to a text?

When writing a response it is important that you get the following points across to your audience.

- How do you feel about what you are reading / saw / heard?
- Relate the issue to your personal life (views, emotions, attitudes ...etc), or to any other issue related to it.
- What do you agree or disagree with?
- Evaluate the examples the author gives. Are they relevant, or enough?
- Can you identify yourself with the situation?
- Add your own examples, facts, statistics, or authority to show why you agree or disagree with what the author says.
- What would be the best way to evaluate the story?
- Discuss the causes and the effects of the issue. See if there are other causes/effects or other types of relations the author did not include.

Respond to the reading with your own commentary: express your opinion about the book and any arguments or conclusions you believes are present in the text.

What to consider?

- a. *Emotions* – Why does the section or the whole book resonate with you?
- b. *Characters* – Who is involved? Why is he/she involved?

- c. *Language* – What do you notice about the choice of words? What literary tools does the author use to enhance the section and how does it affect the story, characters, scene, etc?
- d. What else do you find interesting? What are you confused about? What don't you like?

Objectives: Why do we need to respond to a text?

Writing a text response bridges the gap between the receptive (passive) and the productive (active) skills of the language as it helps students:

- (1) Develop high-level writing skill.
- (2) Refine their critical thinking skill.
- (3) Promote their ability to express their thoughts in writing.
- (4) Engage in reading as an active rather than a passive activity.

Response Journal Design

To succeed in developing an effective story response, the below listed questions help the reader to achieve this objective.

Nb. The students' responses to following questions require evidence from the text

1. Describe the main character(s) in the story. How are they similar or different?
2. What do you predict will happen next in the story? What information from the text helped you make that prediction?
3. What is the main problem in the story? If you know, how was the problem solved?
4. What lesson is the author teaching us in the story? Explain using details from the story.
5. Is there anything you would change about the story? Explain what you would change and why?
6. Would you recommend the story to someone? Why or why not?
7. What word best describes the main character(s)? What does the character do or say that makes you choose that word?
8. What illustrations in the story help you understand what is happening in the story? Explain using details from the story.
9. How is the main character in this story similar and/or different to a character in another story you have read?

10. What is the theme of the story? What other stories have you read with a similar theme?

11. Describe three character traits that a character has in the story. Provide evidence from the story to prove your response.

12. Explain why the setting is important to the story. Could the story take place somewhere else? How would the story be changed if the setting was different?

A Response Journal Sheet (Student's Sample)

	Entries	Details (examples)
1	Date of reading:	From September 10 th to November 2 nd , 2022
2	Title: Author: Date and place of publication: Publisher:	Martin Eden Jack London 1909, San Francisco California (USA) Macmillan
3	Author's biography:	Jack London had a wild youth on the water front of San Francisco, his native city. Born in.....
4	Major works:	The Call of the Wild – the Sea Wolf – The White Fence – The Game
5	Genre:	Fable –Fairy Tale – Fantasy – Mystery – Science Fiction...etc
6	Major themes:	Socialism Vs Individualism Appearances are misleading Solitude is often the best society.....etc
7	Settings:	Place and time: Oakland at the beginning of the 20 th Century
8	Characters:	Martin Eden: a young sailor from a working class background who falls in love with the bourgeois Ruth and educates himself to become a famous writer. Ruth Morse:
9	The summary:	What the story is about without retelling it. Different actions are presented in chronological order.
10	The response:	See section above
11	Extracts	Incorporate one or two well selected quotes to justify your comments (key moment, important event, funny incident...etc)

List of references:

- (1) K, Tankersley (2003). *The Treads of Reading: strategies for literacy development*, ASCD publications, USA.
- (2) K, Lundstrom ; A, Diekema ; H, Leary ; S, Haderlie ; W, Holliday (2015), Teaching and Learning Information Synthesis: An intervention and rubric based assessment, *Communications in Information Literacy* 9(1), 60-82.