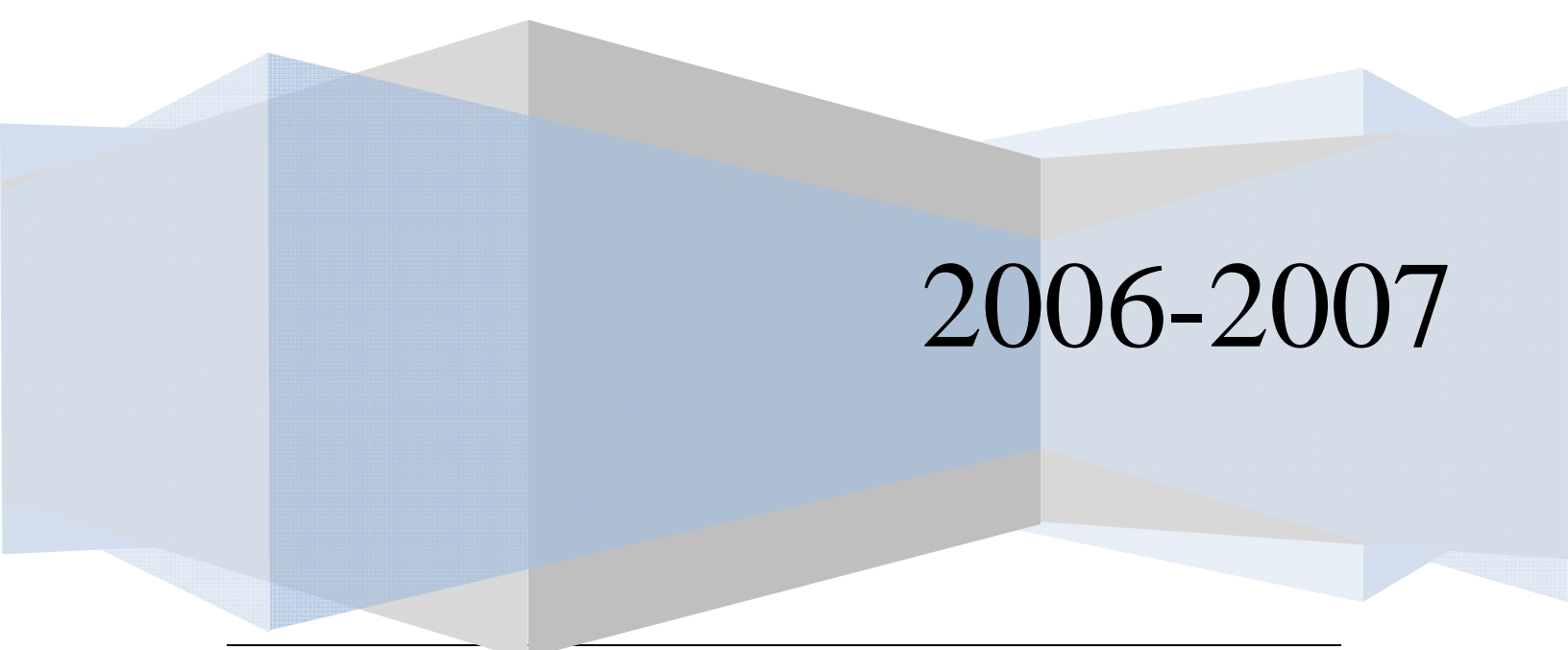# Effective Use of Textbooks

Compiled by the Karen Santos, former Executive Director, Center for Faculty Innovation

2006-2007

Contents

Effective Use of Textbooks in College Courses

Our understanding has increased about how students learn and the relationship of learning to reading and thinking. We understand the difference between the earlier stage of *learning to read* and the application stage of *reading to learn*. In many cases, however, college students may not yet have fully developed abilities to use reading as a tool to learn in our classes. Within our disciplinary courses, we can provide support and enhance students' reading to learn.

Compiled by Karen E. Santos, Executive Director
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James Madison University

Previewing the Textbook

Many textbooks include a wide range of features designed to assist the reader but students may not be aware of nor take advantage of these features. Faculty should use purposeful strategies for previewing their textbooks at the beginning of the semester with a focus on both the structure and contents of the book. Time devoted to setting the stage for effectively using the textbook will pay off throughout the course. This is a time for instructors to share their enthusiasm about the book and help students connect the book to the learning that will occur in the course.

Introduce the Text as a Member of the Class
(Huffman, 1997)

Just as an instructor might introduce himself to the class or have class members introduce each other, a teacher might chose to "introduce the text" in a similar manner.

1. The first step answers the questions, why is the text joining our class (rationale for selection) and what of interest does the book bring to our learning? A friendly and informal approach encourages a positive first impression of the text.

2. As we might ask questions when meeting a new person, the second step asks the students to generate a list of questions about the text with the teacher modeling this first. Questions may involve format, features, or content.

3. The third step involves student pairs surveying the text to find out the answers to their questions and writing down what they find out.

4. Finally students may share their results with the class.

This activity is an example of self-directed text exploration and the benefits include student control of the pace and specifics of the interaction. It creates a positive and non-threatening introduction with the outcome of students viewing the text as an "accessible educational partner" rather than a "remote academic authority" (Huffman, 1997, p.57).

Huffman, L. E. (1996). What's in it for you? A student-directed text preview. Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 40(1), 56-57.

Textbook Sales Pitches / Commercials
(Garber-Miller, 2007)

0. Divide the class in half. Distribute textbooks to the students in one group. Inform them that they will take part in an acting scenario in which they will play the part of textbook salespersons. Instruct them to use their preparation time to thoroughly pursue the book and get an understanding of its organization, special features, benefits, and weakness. Encourage them to divide the task within the group to more thoroughly explore as many areas as possible within the textbook. Tell them to come prepared to make a persuasive sales pitch for the textbook to an audience of skeptical teachers and students. Stipulate that all group members must take part in the act.

1. Distribute textbooks to the other half of the class. Inform them that they also will be participating in this acting scenario as the skeptical teachers and students who are serving on a textbook selection committee. Instruct them to use their preparation time to discuss what they feel is important in a quality textbook. Have them construct a list of what they will be looking for in their respective roles as teachers and students. Finally, direct them to prepare a list of questions and concerns they will pose to the textbook salespersons based on their own review of the textbook.

2. Bring the student groups together to participate in the acting experience. Facilitate this process as needed.

3. Raise any additional considerations that students may have missed in their perusals when the acting and discussion are complete.

Garber-Miller, K. (2007). Playful textbook previews: Letting go of familiar mustache monologues. Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 50(4), 284-288.

Previewing the Textbook

What's Old and What's New
(Garber-Miller, 2007)

0. Break the class into small groups. Give each group a chapter to review. Instruct students to pursue the topics and special features within their sections.

1. Ask the groups to consider the primary topics covered and list them on a chart under the column headings What's Old and What's New. In order to categorize the topics, ask them to consider whether the content has been covered in past classes. There may be some disagreement among group members, so encourage them to develop a consensus.

2. Instruct students upon chart completion to return to the What's Old column and place an asterisk beside the topics they have reviewed several times. In the "What's New" column, ask them to circle items that are so new that they had never heard of them before this experience.

3. Have each group come forward in turn to display the charts. Allow students to lead their classmates on a chapter walk, pointing out old and new concepts. Encourage them to seek feedback from the class about their lists.

Garber-Miller, K. (2007). Playful textbook previews: Letting go of familiar mustache monologues. Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 50(4), 284-288.

Name That Feature

(Garber-Miller 2007)

1. Distribute textbooks and ask each student to look for features that are important or recurrent. Model this process first.

2. Group students into teams and have them share their independent findings. Ask one student to record all ideas being shared within each group.

3. Have the groups report their collaborative findings to the whole class. While the students speak, record the names of the features they identify on the board. If students fail to notice an important feature, bring it to their attention and add it to the list.

4. Assign several of these features to each team once the list is complete. Have the students generate a written description of what each feature does for the book. Collect these descriptions when students are finished.

5. Play "name that feature" using the student-generated descriptions from another class period or block. Read each description aloud for the student teams. Team members should be allowed to discuss their response with one another and look to the board for help. When the team has a response, the team spokesperson should stand. The first one up should attempt an answer.

6. Award one point to the team with the quickest correct response. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

Garber-Miller, K. (2007). Playful textbook previews: Letting go of familiar mustache monologues. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 50(4), 284-288.

Textbook Timelines

(adapted from Garber-Miller, 2007)

1. Develop a timeline for the semester. For each week, identify the themes, units, or chapters that will be studied. Post the timeline in a visible place in the classroom.

2. Divide students into groups according to their birth months. Assign each group the section(s) of the text that will be studied during that timeframe. Use summer birthdays to cover auxiliary features within the book (e.g., appendixes).

3. Have each group take a cursory look at the sections and give a brief oral *preview* while classmates follow them through the book. Have each group create a unique visual element to summarize or represent the section.

4. Post each group's visual representation along the classroom timeline. Throughout the semester, revisit the visual representations as you begin instruction on the various themes, units, or chapters.

5. Ask students to create a new visual representation upon completion of each study unit, or have them tell the class how they would adapt their original illustration based on their new comprehensive understanding of the material.

Garber-Miller, K. (2007). Playful textbook previews: Letting go of familiar mustache monologues. Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 50(4), 284-288.

Textbook Scavenger Hunts

(Garber-Miller, 2007)

0. Provide students with a list of items to find in their textbooks. Allow them to work as individuals or in groups. Be sure your prompts are purposefully written to get students into all parts of the textbook.

   Examples might include
   1. What are the titles of four authors contributing to the textbook?
   2. In what appendix would you find an explanation of...?
   3. Each chapter ends with a summary and what?
   4. Activity 2.4 is about what?
   5. On what page would you find a photograph of...?
   6. Identify one strength of this textbook. Use a page number to illustrate.
   7. Suggest one way to make this textbook better. Use a page number to illustrate.

1. Set a time limit for the activity and encourage students to locate and respond to as many prompts as possible.

2. Conclude the activity with a review of all the items students were able to locate. Have students total their correct responses to name a winner.

Garber-Miller, K. (2007). Playful textbook previews: Letting go of familiar mustache monologues. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 50*(4), 284-288.

Previewing the Textbook

Textbook Picture Walks

(Garber-Miller, 2007)

1. Ask students to carefully peruse the index of the textbook, noting the various themes and topics to be covered throughout the year.

2. Present students with a reproduced picture or visual from each chapter or section of the textbook.

3. Have students predict which pictures or visuals might match the index topic headings without looking through the sections. In pairs or small groups, have them share their ideas about why they think certain pictures or visuals might match certain chapters or section headings.

4. Ask students to move through the book and peruse the chapters or sections to find the actual matches.

5. Conclude the activity with a whole-group discussion about students' correct and incorrect matches. This dialogue will provide insight to students' background knowledge about the topics.

6. (Possible adaptation: If there are chapters without any images, students might quickly skim the chapter and creating a corresponding visual image to share.)

Garber-Miller, K. (2007). Playful textbook previews: Letting go of familiar mustache monologues. Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 50(4), 284-288.

Previewing the Textbook

Sticky Note Votes
(Garber-Miller, 2007)

1. Have students leaf through the book from cover to cover and place sticky notes on any feature they think is special. Model this process first.

2. Bring students back together as a class and have them name the features they identified with sticky notes. Get all ideas on the board.

3. Place students in pairs or small groups. Have them reconsider the list and rank order the identified features in terms of perceived importance to reading and studying processes. Encourage them to do this by voting. The actual outcome of the ranking is not as important as the collaborative discussion that occurs about how, when, where, and why various features are beneficial for reading and studying.

4. Moderate a discussion as each small group shares rankings and rationales with the class.

Garber-Miller, K. (2007). Playful textbook previews: Letting go of familiar mustache monologues. Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 50(4), 284-288.

Fascinating Features
(Garber-Miller, 2007)

1. Distribute textbooks and give students time to look through them. Pass out index cards and ask students to put their names on them.

2. Ask students to find an artist, title, topic, picture, cartoon, poem, song, or activity in the book that appeals to them. Have them note their choice on the index cards, along with a page number and explanation of why this feature appeals to them. You can tailor the prompt to fit the type of textbook used in the discipline.

3. Use the cards as a way to facilitate classmate introductions. Each student presents from his or her card, and classmates can flip through the book and note the various items as each student speaks. By the conclusion of the introductory session, students will have had a chance to get to know one another and the textbook.

4. Collect the introduction cards and revisit them throughout the year as the sections of the book are addressed. You might begin a unit introduction by saying, "Remember this topic was of special interest to Scott when he introduced himself at the beginning of the year. He found this topic intriguing because...."

Garber-Miller, K. (2007). Playful textbook previews: Letting go of familiar mustache monologues. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 50*(4), 284-288.

Before Reading the Textbook

Accessing students' prior knowledge and building background knowledge is an essential aspect of good textbook use. The instructor has a responsibility to fill in gaps that occur between students' background knowledge and the content of the textbook (Beck & McKeown, 1991). When the instructor helps students use what they know to explore what they do not know, students will be more successful in organizing and synthesizing new information. There are a range of strategies faculty can use prior to assigning textbook reading to make the reading experience more purposeful and meaningful for students.

What Does the Author Say?

1. Instructor creates prompts that encourage students to investigate what the textbook author "says" about the topic. The prompts are two or three prime questions that require reading and synthesis of the author's perspective and serve as a motivator for preparation and reading. These prompts are given to students at the end of a class session and prior to reading the textbook.

2. Students then read the textbook and actively note responses to the prompts.

3. A related technique is for the instructor to present one person's viewpoint on a topic and then have students read their textbook to determine that author's perspective on the same topic.

KWL
(adapted from Ogle, 1986)

K	W	L
What I Already KNOW	What I WANT to Know	What I Learned

1. Develop a chart with three columns. This is used to activate students' prior knowledge about a topic before reading.

2. Ask students what they know about the topic. The chart can be filled in as a class activity or individual students can complete their own charts.

3. The instructor facilitates an activity in which students (either as a group or individually) generate what else they want to learn or questions they want to be able to answer.

4. Students read with the purpose of discovering information to answer questions they generated. As students read independently, they can then fill in what they have learned. They can also go back to the first column and correct any inaccuracies.

Ogle, D.M. (1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. *Reading Teacher, 39*, 564-570.

Before Reading the Textbook

Mysterious Possibilities

(adapted from Stephens & Brown, 2000, p.37-38)

1. With an air of mystery, the instructor shows an object, photograph, picture, or videoclip.

2. Students are asked to solve the mystery by brainstorming and predicting possible connections to the topic.

3. The instructor engages the class in discussion and uses the generated ideas as a springboard for the new content and upcoming reading assignment.

Stephens, E. C., & Brown, J. E. (2000). A handbook of content literacy strategies: 75 practical reading and writing ideas. Norwood, Mass: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Before Reading the Textbook

Reaction Guide
(adapted from Stephens & Brown, 2000, p.49-50)

1. Instructor provides students with a series of statements (3-7), based on important points, major concepts, controversial ideas, or misconceptions from the textbook reading that students will be doing. Statements should involve a range of thinking skills. The instructor creates a way for students to respond to the statements (agree/disagree, yes/no, true/false, correct/incorrect, etc.).

2. Students respond to each statement based on what they currently think or believe. Without revealing the accurate responses, the instructor uses the statements as a basis for a discussion to stimulate curiosity about the reading.

3. Students read the textbook assignment and afterwards respond again to the statements in the reaction guide. They may be required to find evidence from the new material to support their responses or provide page numbers of specific information about the statement.

Stephens, E. C., & Brown, J. E. (2000). A handbook of content literacy strategies: 75 practical reading and writing ideas. Norwood, Mass: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Before Reading the Textbook

Vocabulary Alert

(adapted from Stephens & Brown, 2000, p.51-52)

1. Instructor selects most important terms from the reading assignment and inserts them in chart.

Vocabulary Word	I know 1	It is sort of familiar 2 3 4	I don't know 5

2. Students individually assess they familiarity with each term.

3. The instructor relates the terms to the context of the topic and assigned reading.

4. As students read the textbook, they record information about the words on the form.

5. The instructor can then use this as an activity to further develop or clarify their understanding of the key vocabulary.

Stephens, E. C., & Brown, J. E. (2000). A handbook of content literacy strategies: 75 practical reading and writing ideas. Norwood, Mass: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Analogies

(adapted from Stephens & Brown, 2000, p.58-59)

1. The instructor carefully develops an analogy related to the concept to be studied and information which will be read in the textbook. The analogy should be something that students can identify with and understand. Using an analogy can help make an abstract concept more concrete for the students.

2. The instructor leads a discussion using the analogy. In addition, students might be invited to develop an alternative analogy related to the material. This causes the students to explore the elements and characteristics of the concept.

3. Students share their analogies with the class and highlight the relationship of the elements to the concept to be learned.

Stephens, E. C., & Brown, J. E. (2000). A handbook of content literacy strategies: 75 practical reading and writing ideas. Norwood, Mass: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

While Reading The Textbook

The goal is to make content manageable and create purposeful opportunities for students to interact with the text while they are reading. Students will have increased opportunity to learn from the textbook if they move from passive reading to active involvement. There are a variety of strategies instructors can use to help students create meaning from their reading.

Instructor Read or Re-read the Text

The instructor should be familiar with the reading material that is assigned to students. Read or reread the books students are required to read. With busy teaching schedules, it is easy to fall victim to forgetfulness. It is possible to not remember just what attracted us to a particular book the first time, or, if we use multiple resources for our content, we may forget just what the required book has to offer. Re-reading the books we require our students to read is likely to remind us of their positive features. If rereading exposes weaknesses in our choices, then it's probably time to change books.

Re-reading chapters we expect the students to be reading also makes the material more vibrant, more current. It is easier to refer to information or examples from the textbook when they are fresh on our mind. Students appreciate when the instructor refers to the text and is obviously familiar with the contents.

When faculty read the material it provides a barometer for how long it may take students to read the textbook assignment. This may help faculty better gauge how much to assign especially if it is complex material.

X Marks the Spot

(adapted from Stephens & Brown, 2000, p.72-73)

1. The instructor introduces a symbolic system to help students interact with the reading material. Students are prompted to read for three specific purposes which include identifying significant information, new information, and information that is confusing to them. Instructors may want to specify what students should look for in their reading (i.e., 4 key points, 2 interesting or new ideas, 3 questions you have).

2. Students read the textbook assignment and mark an X near information that is significant. They mark a ! for information that is interesting and new. They mark a ? when they are confused or need additional clarification. Students can mark directly in their texts or use stickynotes.

3. The next class session's discussion is based on student notations, especially those that require clarification.

Stephens, E. C., & Brown, J. E. (2000). A handbook of content literacy strategies: 75 practical reading and writing ideas. Norwood, Mass: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Graphic Organizers

1. Use graphic organizers to help students identify the important information and conceptualize the relationships between information (for example, using a ladder to show the sequence of steps or a Venn diagram to compare/contrast). Select an appropriate graphic organizer format to match the reading content.

2. State the thinking skill required while reading and provide a graphic organizer for taking notes from the reading assignment. For example, compare and contrast…. using a Venn diagram.

3. Use the completed graphic organizers during the next class. In small groups students can share their notes.

4. An adaptation is to ask students to take notes selecting or creating a graphic organizer of their choice. Again, use these during the next class session.
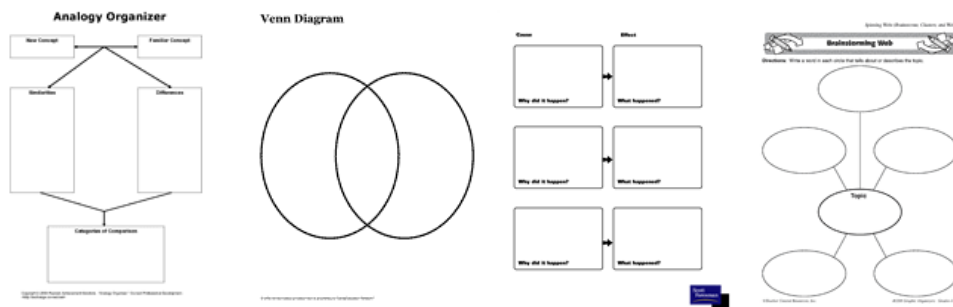
After Reading The

Textbook

Students are more likely to read textbook assignments and be prepared for class when instructors hold them accountable for this reading. There are a variety of ways to use information from the textbook in engaging class activities in which students have an opportunity to wrestle with, apply, or discuss, what they read.

After Reading the Textbook

Co-Learning with Textbooks

1. Students are required to read the assigned chapter and answer questions prior to coming to class. The questions are posted as a "Preparation Guide" on the Blackboard course management system each week. The purpose of these questions is to help students synthesize the learning material and assist them in focusing their learning.

2. During the next class session for about 5-10 minutes, pairs of students discuss the homework questions and identify difficulties related to the readings. They formulate unresolved questions for the instructor. These class questions then become the focus for the lecture.

3. The merit of this system is that students spend time mindfully reading the material prior to coming to class.

4. During class sessions students are more involved. By focusing only on what is not clear, class time can be devoted to experiential activities and/or expanding on the readings.

Dr. Stacy Zinn, JMU Psychology Professor, 2007

Personal Response System

Personal Response Systems involve the instructor using a computer and a projector and students using a wireless keypad to respond to questions posed by the instructor.

1. Develop a series of questions to ask related to the textbook reading. These may be factual or opinion questions but in the format of multiple choice or yes/no. Create presentation slides to display the questions.

2. Assign reading for homework.

3. Begin the next class session with "clicker questions." Show individual questions and have students respond by "clicking" their answers. Aggregated response data for each question can be graphically displayed for all to view. The software is able to monitor individual results thus the instructor may opt to use responses for course points.

4. Students are provided with immediate feedback on their responses and are better able to gauge their understanding of the material. Clickers may improve attentiveness and active involvement in class. These questions may also serve as motivation for thoroughly reading the material prior to class. In addition, responses provide the instructor with information about students' understanding of the textbook content.

Jigsaw
(adapted from Aronson, 1978)

1. Divide students into "base groups." For example, six groups of four students each. Divide textbook reading material into parts. The parts should equal the number of students in each group.

2. For homework, assign one section of reading to each member of the "base group." The textbook chapter or book can be divided into sections and each section assigned to an expert group.

3. On the next day of class, regroup students so that all students with a specific part now meet in an "expert group." There will be the same number of expert groups as there are parts to the material.

4. Expert groups review their part of the textbook reading, identify the relevant information to share, and devise a strategy for teaching the material to others when they return to base groups.

5. Experts return to base groups and teach material from their part to the other members in their group. Each person takes a turn until all parts have been shared.

Aronson, E., Blaney, N., Stephin, C., Sikes, J. & Snapp, M. (1978). The jigsaw classroom. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing Company.

Kagan, S. (1990). Cooperative learning: Resources for teachers. San Jaun Capistrano, CA: Resources for Teachers, Inc

Minute Paper

(adapted from Angelo & Cross, 1993)

1. Assign textbook reading for homework.

2. Set aside five or so minutes at the beginning of class and assign students a "minute paper" on their textbook reading. Ideas for minute papers include "the most important idea I got from today's reading assignment" or "something I would like explained." These questions can be visibly posted or written on a sheet of paper which is distributed to each student.

3. The "minute papers" can be used in several ways. Students can pair and share their responses. Students can work to explain information to each other. The instructor may collect the "minute papers" and quickly peruse to gain information about aspects of the reading that need further explanation or sharing insights students have gained.

4. Asking students to write their names and collecting the "minute papers" are techniques instructors can use to motivate students to complete the reading prior to class.

Angelo, T. A., & Cross, P. K. (1993). Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

. After Reading the Textbook

Include Textbook Questions in Start-of-Class Reviews

1. Develop review questions related to the assigned reading.

2. At the start of the next class session, ask randomly-selected students questions about information in the textbook. Beginning each class period with this routine encourages students to come prepared by reading and reviewing prior to each class. To call on students, instructors can have their pictures or names on cards and randomly pull cards.

3. This can be modified by allowing the student to "ask a friend" if they need assistance.

Just-in-Time Teaching (JiTT)

Just-in-Time Teaching is a strategy based on the interaction between web-based study assignments and an active learner classroom.

1. The instructor carefully constructs web-based assignments related to textbook readings.

2. These are due shortly before class. Students post their responses electronically.

3. The instructor reads the student submissions "just-in-time" to adjust the classroom instruction to accommodate the students' needs.

4. Examples of excellent student responses can be shared with the class. These models of quality responses provide information which helps individual students metacognitively monitor their own performance.

JiTT creates a "feedback loop" formed by the students' outside-of-class preparation that fundamentally affects what happens during the subsequent in-class time together. Interaction between the instructor and students is increased related to course content.

Novak, G, Gavrin, A., Christian, W. & Patterson, E. (1999). Just-In-Time teaching: Blending active learning with web technology. Prentice Hall.

After Reading the Textbook

Permit "Open Book" Testing

Permitting students' access to their books for only a few minutes or for certain portions of a test can serve as a good motivator for preparatory reading and study before the test. Students see the textbook as a highly useful tool and become very familiar with contents when they can use it during testing.

Instructor Emphasis on Textbook Use
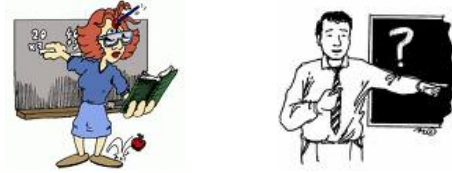
Instructors should use the text to complement classroom instruction. This does not mean, duplicating the text, but when explaining content the instructor might make direct references to the page and use the language of the text as part of the discussion. Actually pointing to figures on the page or working through examples help the students see the importance of the book in their learning (Thomas, 1999).

Instructor Take Book to Class →

Students Bring Book to Class

Carrying a book into the classroom suggests it has a place in the classroom; leaving it in the office may inadvertently suggest just the opposite to students.

Modeling for the students a physical ownership of a book may render a connection between professor-content-book that counters a disconnect when the professor and book are never seen together.

Expect students to also bring the textbook to class. This is reinforced by referring to textbook often, pointing out specific information or diagrams in the book, and requesting students turn to specific pages as explanations are provided.

Talk Positively About the Book

There are positive features as well as challenges with most textbooks. In the ideal situation, instructors have had the time to research the best textbook and have the freedom to use this book in their course. In other situations, a committee might select the book or the professor may have even made a poor textbook selection. In any case, students have spent money on the book and want this to be money well spent both in terms of the amount they use the book as well as the learning they perceive results from this use. Instructors need to be conscious of how they describe the book to students, maximizing the positive features and supplementing the challenges posed by the book.

Show Textbooks During Lectures

Classroom document projectors enable the instructor to show direct examples from the book. This may involve reference to textbook citations, reading selections, figures, tables, etc. The fact that the instructor has the book in class and is actively using it during the lecture, promotes student understanding of the importance of the textbook for their learning.

Include page numbers from textbook on Power Point Slides

Students do not like Powerpoint slides to duplicate material in the textbook, making them conclude that the textbook is unnecessary.

It is however very effective to relate information on Powerpoint slides to the textbook. This can be accomplished by including corresponding page numbers, table numbers, or figure numbers to lectures slides. Vocabulary, quotes, or main ideas from the textbook can be referenced on slides. Again, this technique helps students see the relationship between the textbook and course content and draws attention to the value of the textbook for indepth information and explanations.

Provide Copies of Readings with Own Margin Notes

Offering students copies of instructor margin notes demonstrates the reflective strategies readers engage in during reading (e.g., *Is this a sufficient argument for …. ? Great analogy,* etc.). It can also provide students a dialogue opportunity—if only mentally—with their instructor while reading the same text.

Instructor Reads to the Students

Take the opportunity to read something of importance from the textbook to your students. Some aspects of books work well as a "read-to." This may be a sentence, paragraph, page, contents of a box, definition, quote, problem, case, item from table of contents or index, reference, etc.

Dynamic reading can be effective, especially when used strategically and judicially during instructional time in the classroom. Reading aloud focuses the students on the importance of the book and the content being highlighted. It makes a strong connection between the textbook, the course content, and the instructor.

This strategy can be adapted to have students periodically read aloud parts from the book.

Provide Textbook Office Hours

Offer students specified office hours dedicated only to textbook reading or discussion. Encourage students to come to these office hours with specific questions about ambiguous or indecipherable text. Encourage the student to read the section silently (and do the same) and then take turns explaining the text.

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