

## Encouraging Students to Read

*"From the moment I picked up your book until I put it down, I was convulsed with laughter. Someday I intend reading it."* –Groucho Marx

Most of us have seen this downward spiral: We assign reading. Students—inexperienced at academic reading—find it challenging and don't complete it. During the next session, we encounter blank faces, so we give an ad hoc lecture on the reading instead of leading a planned discussion. We assign more reading. Students—having concluded that they don't really need to read—skip the assignment. In class, we again encounter blank faces and again begin summarizing the contents of the reading.

As the spiral continues, we become more frustrated and students lose opportunities to engage in the richness of the course content and to develop the reading skills they need. What to do? Here are three suggestions.

Mary Ann Weimer suggests stopping the downward spiral early. The first time students show up unprepared, she suggests calmly saying something like this: "This article is really quite important. Too bad you aren't ready to work with it as I had planned" and moving to an alternative activity designed for just that moment. Weimer says no scolding—but no summarizing the reading, either.

John Bean notes that background knowledge helps students understand a text. Often we provide that just before a discussion. Bean suggests shifting the overview to the end of the previous class, when we make the assignment. We might point out the central focus of the reading, or alert students to a tricky passage or important term. We can also record these short introductions and post them on the class web site.

Norman Eng proposes an activity he calls QQC for "question, quotation, comment." As students read, they note a question, select an interesting quotation, or make a comment; the instructor then devotes 10 or 15 minutes to QQCs. Eng suggests three ways to make QQCs work. Use them regularly. Call on students randomly rather than waiting for the typical volunteers. Use this "cold calling" in good faith--involve many students but avoid deliberating embarrassing the momentarily distracted.

Want to read more?

Bean, J. C. (2011). *Engaging ideas*. 2<sup>nd</sup>. ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (Available in the CTL library.)

Gonzalez, J. (2017). "5 Ways College Teachers Can Improve Their Instruction." *Cult of Pedagogy*. Retrieved from <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/teaching-college/>

Weimer, M. (2010). 11 Strategies for Getting Students to Read What's Assigned. Retrieved from: <http://www.facultyfocus.com/free-reports/11-strategies-for-getting-students-to-read-whats-assigned/>