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CCCC Position Statement on the Role of Reading in College Writing Classrooms

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Rationale and Purpose

This position statement affirms the need to develop accessible and effective reading pedagogies in college writing classrooms so that students can engage more deeply in all of their courses and develop the reading abilities that will be essential to their success in college, in their careers, and for their participation in a democratic society. This statement assumes that, like instruction in writing, instruction in reading is most ethical and effective when it engages students' diverse experiences, needs, and capacities and when it works from an asset-based (rather than a deficit-based) theory of learning. The statement outlines principles and best practices for developing reading-centered pedagogies and curricula and identifies resources and sites at postsecondary institutions that can support this work.

Horning et al. define college-level reading as "a complex, recursive process in which readers actively and critically understand and create meaning through connections to texts" (7). Research that assesses the alignment between new college students' prior reading experience and the expectations of college reading tasks suggests that many students are likely to encounter different and challenging reading tasks upon entering college (Jolliffe and Harl; Rodrigue; Jamieson; Stanford History Education Group; Ihara and Del Principe; Wineburg and McGrew). Students are also reading in increasingly diverse modes and for distinct purposes as reading moves increasingly to screens rather than paper.

This statement acknowledges that students are regularly reading (Jolliffe and Harl), that they have reading skills, and that they are using a range of technologies to support their reading. Technology has allowed students to engage with readings by listening to texts, seeing texts in various font sizes, and copying and making notes on texts. Use of synchronous technology, such as digital annotation programs, allows students to practice deep reading strategies while gaining almost immediate access to their peers' approaches to reading. Moreover, the web provides digital examples of cultural knowledge formation (such as rhetorical reading) that communities of color, LGBTQ communities, and disability communities have cultivated offline for years. Instructors can mobilize these technologies to support students' development of deeper reading habits.

For decades, community college curricula have directly addressed students' reading habits, and community college instructors have researched and published on best practices for integrating instruction in reading and writing (Goen-Salter; Raufman and Barrow; Bickerstaff and Raufman; Boylan and Bonham). Only recently, however, have those who teach at four-year institutions begun to argue for the importance of reconnecting the act of reading to writing. Not since the 1980s and early 1990s have those outside of community colleges paid sustained attention to reading as the counterpart of writing in the construction and negotiation of meaning.

Definition(s) of Reading

College-level reading varies depending on the reader's primary purpose, and different reading approaches each have their own emphasis: "rhetorical reading" and "reading like a

writer” suggest reading texts for the purposes of understanding the impact of writerly choices, “close reading” is focused primarily on textual interpretation, and “active reading” and “mindful reading” suggest a type of mindset or orientation toward a text.

Reading, then, goes well beyond mere comprehension of words and texts, and instructors need to realize that students may be more or less familiar with different types of reading. Indeed, individual students may be proficient with multiple reading approaches or may struggle with basic comprehension. This position statement marks CCCC members’ commitment to recognizing *all* college-level reading as a “complex, recursive process in which readers actively and critically understand and create meaning through connections to texts” (Horning et al., 7).

The strategies that follow are proven effective. They are suggestions for those who wish to integrate reading more deliberately into their teaching practices.

Principles to Support the Teaching and Learning of Reading

Principle 1: Teach Reading Comprehension

Strategies:

1. Create text-specific or general reading guides for students that include comprehension questions, important vocabulary terms, and other relevant resources that students can use as they engage texts.
2. Preview texts for students by providing context (whether historical or related to the immediate classroom), thus helping students tap into what they already know about the subject and helping to provide the purpose for each reading assignment.
3. Teach students how to develop and use graphic organizers (e.g., maps, webs) to help them visualize relationships between concepts and ideas within texts.
4. Teach students to read strategically by paying attention to key parts of a text, such as its title, introduction (or abstract), conclusion, and paragraph topic sentences.
5. Encourage students to take the 25-word summary challenge, in which they summarize the text in 25 words or fewer.

Principle 2: Teach Reading Approaches That Move Beyond Basic Comprehension

Strategies:

1. Don’t lecture the readings; make students responsible for getting main ideas and details through creating their own reading guides that outline the main ideas, define key terms, and note connections to other texts read in the course.
2. Ask students to synthesize two viewpoints and/or address opposing viewpoints on the same topic.
3. Provide exercises and/or use peer review to help students support one another and anticipate readers’ expectations.
4. Promote rhetorical reading, wherein students examine a text for its communicative nature and elements. Help students identify how context influences readers.
5. Teach students how to “read like a writer” (RLW) by identifying moments of writerly choice in the text and considering whether similar choices might arise in their own writing.

Principle 3: Foster Mindful Reading to Encourage Students to Think Metacognitively about Their Reading in Preparation for a Variety of Reading in Different Contexts

Strategies:

1. Teach the SQ5R approach: survey (the text or reading), question (engage in inquiry), read (engage in active reading), respond (think about the text and the initial questions), record (annotate in the margins), recite (paraphrase key ideas), and review (reflect on the reading and revise notes).

2. Teach annotation explicitly and/or use software such as Hypothesis to support the development of digital annotation practices.
3. Encourage reflection through reader response journals, discussion board postings, or similar approaches.
4. In addition to asking students to reflect encourage them to anticipate the uses of various reading approaches in future courses and contexts.
5. Teach students how to create a difficulty inventory in which they list the difficulties (e.g., vocabulary, allusions, historical context) they encounter while reading and for each difficulty indicate one resource that can help mitigate or surmount that difficulty.

Principle 4: Teach Students How to Read Texts Closely and Focus on Significant Details and Patterns

Strategies:

1. Support students' focus on a text's language and vocabulary by asking them to look up key vocabulary, terms, and concepts and to consider how meanings change over time.
2. Help students explore organizational patterns in texts from different disciplines, such as linguistic features, stylistic characteristics, and the presence or absence of jargon.
3. Ask students to write passage-based papers that focus their attention on a single passage, including the textual elements within the passage (e.g., word choice, tone, punctuation, repetition), as well as the passage's relationship to the text as a whole.
4. Provide students the opportunity to practice reading a text multiple times in order to pay attention to different elements, such as how a writer incorporates sources, defines key terms, or addresses opposing arguments.
5. Focus on the generic elements of a text to foster discussion of genre conventions and how those conventions can influence reading.

Preparing Teachers for Reading Instruction in Writing Courses

Given the tremendous variety in new instructor training programs, it is important for facilitators to prioritize what they want students to know and do with regard to reading. Some programs may be limited to a single session devoted to reading, whereas a more ideal approach would be to integrate the discussion of reading throughout an entire training program. Additionally, as the representations and needs of students constantly shift, it is also important to consider how to integrate accessible and culturally relevant approaches to reading instruction into the overall fabric of writing programs. Doing so encourages writing teachers—from senior faculty to first-time teachers—to develop reading pedagogies that serve ever-changing student populations and are responsive to the contemporary moment.

Strategies for training instructors to teach reading include the following:

- Introduce the idea that reading and writing are connected activities as a foundational threshold concept that instructors should keep in mind as they teach, plan lessons, and design their syllabi.
- Plan talks or activities aimed at familiarizing writing instructors with several kinds of reading approaches and the purpose(s) behind each.
- Encourage instructors to think through what they want students to learn from reading and consider what kinds of texts and types of reading would best serve their goal(s).
- Guide writing instructors to consider the range of reading approaches and techniques that students will need to engage productively with a variety of modalities. Recognizing how technological mediums interplay with genre conventions (e.g., online versus print newspaper article) introduces useful conversations about reading as a rhetorical process informed by rhetorical decisions.
- Brainstorm and/or practice different ways that instructors might model various kinds of reading for students—for instance, showing students how they read a text and stopping to demonstrate the kinds of questions they ask as they read.

- Review and answer questions about specific programmatic policies regarding the types and relevance or appropriateness of texts to be assigned for specific student populations at your institution (e.g., literature, videos?), as well as reasonable page length expectations. This discussion might address texts composed using varieties of Englishes and/or texts that acknowledge the rhetoric of citation practices in order to better engage audience needs via font styles and organizational schemas.
- Encourage instructors to use published texts and student writing in similar ways and to avoid assigning only published texts as examples of good writing while urging students to search for errors only in student-produced texts.

Supporting Readers across Campus Units

This section notes important stakeholders on campuses that can contribute to building a culture of support surrounding reading development. This statement encourages communication and collaboration among writing program administrators, writing instructors, and the various members of these units—libraries, writing centers, and centers for teaching and learning—so that all stakeholders are working together to support students' reading development throughout their academic careers.

Libraries

Librarians have long been at the forefront of information literacy education. Although campus librarians are often used for one-shot presentations about how to access and search their institution's databases, they can work consistently with faculty across the disciplines to help faculty identify information literacy concepts relevant to specific disciplines (Anderson et al. 16). They can also support students as they develop the capabilities that inform strong reading practices, including paying attention to a source's relevance, biases, and credibility.

Writing Centers

As Muriel Harris, G. Travis Adams, and Gary Griswold have pointed out, writing centers are always already reading centers because most college-level writing assignments also involve reading. Therefore, it is important that writing center directors are educated on reading pedagogy so they can deliberately incorporate attention to reading in the training given to writing center tutors. Doing so will allow tutors to support students' literacy development in more comprehensive ways by preparing them to address reading-related writing issues.

Centers for Teaching and Learning

Often given a name such as Center for Teaching Excellence, centers for teaching and learning are seen as hubs of pedagogical innovation and faculty development, and, according to Mary Wright, are supposed "to be responsive to institutional goals and priorities, and to work in collaboration with faculty and academic units, guided by their learning goals" (qtd. in Lieberman). These centers need to be prepared to support faculty as they integrate reading instruction into their courses.

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Suggested Reading List

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