Talking to the Text (T4)

- Strategy used to help you comprehend (learn and understand) readings
- Good readers “talk to the text” in their heads
- Practicing it by writing it out teaches us to do it in our heads
- Follow these steps to do:
  1. Begin reading the passage
  2. Highlight or circle words or phrases you can identify with
  3. In the margins, make notes, ask questions, make comments, and make predictions
  4. Think about these things:
     - Connections you can make to what you know
     - What you wonder about as you read
     - Words, phrases, or sentences that you find interesting
     - Questions about or wanting additional information
- Using the T4 strategy helps you understand and remember your readings

Advantages of Talking to the Text (T4)

1. Utilizes all 7 strategies of a good reader to improve comprehension
2. Prepares the reader to discuss the text
3. Allows time to analyze one’s personal reading process (metacognitive thinking)
4. Engages the reader so one can connect to the text
5. Improves one’s ability to think about the content of the text

What is Talking to the Text (T4)?

Talking to the Text is when a person puts down their thoughts in writing or when one draws mental pictures while reading.

As one reads, it’s important that he or she writes on the text, on note paper, or on a post-it notes.

Symbols are used as a way of labeling one’s thoughts or pictures. For instance, if a reader writes down a prediction, he or she can use the prediction symbol to indicate that thought. It helps the reader organize their work!
I quickly realized that I had no real game plan for reading this complicated textbook. I didn't know what to highlight or how to find the important information to study. The text simply overwhelmed me.

Flash forward to my first few years of teaching. I taught senior English, and I was determined to provide my students help when it came to annotating texts. We practiced annotations throughout the year, and my instructions went something like: “Mark it up! Underline important information! Write in the margins!”

While this method may have been slightly more effective than what I used that first day of college, it was still too vague and ambiguous for my students. They had no direction for reading, especially when it was a complicated text they did not understand.

Last fall, I attended an AVID workshop about critical reading strategies. To be honest, it completely changed the way I teach reading. I learned many simple strategies to help my students attack a text. After the conference, our department began adapting the strategies to all of the types of texts that we teach. Here are five simple strategies to help teach students how to critically read complex texts. The best part? Highlighters are not required.

1. Number the paragraphs

The Common Core asks students to be able to cite and refer to the text. One simple way to do this is by numbering each paragraph, section or stanza in the left hand margin. When students refer to the text, I require them to state which paragraph they are referring to. The rest of the class will be able to quickly find the line being referred to.

2. Chunk the text.

When faced with a full page of text, reading it can quickly become overwhelming for students. Breaking up the text into smaller sections (or chunks) makes the page much more manageable for students. Students do this by drawing a horizontal line between paragraphs to divide the page into smaller sections.

At the beginning of the year, I group the paragraphs into chunks before I hand out the assignment. In the directions I will say, “Chunk paragraphs 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10.” I look at the paragraphs to see where natural chunks occur. Paragraphs 1-3 may be the hook and thesis statement; while 6-8 may be the paragraphs where the author addresses the opposition. It is important to understand that there is no right or wrong way to chunk the text, as long as you can justify why you grouped certain paragraphs together.

By the end of the year, I begin to let go of that responsibility and ask my students to chunk the text on their own. They number the paragraphs then must make decisions about what paragraphs will be grouped together. Usually, most of the class is very similar in the way they chunked the text.

http://iteachcoachiblog.blogspot.com/2012/06/five-simple-close-reading-strategies.html
3. Underline and circle... with a purpose.

Telling students to simply underline “the important stuff” is too vague. “Stuff” is not a concrete thing that students can identify. Instead, direct students to underline and circle very specific things. Think about what information you want students to take from the text, and ask them to look for those elements. What you have students circle and underline may change depending on the text type.

For example, when studying an argument, ask students to underline “claims”. We identify claims as belief statements that the author is making. Students will quickly discover that the author makes multiple claims throughout the argument.

When studying poetry, students could underline the imagery they find throughout the poem. Circling specific items is also an effective close reading strategy. I often have my students circle “key terms” in the text. I define key terms as words that: 1. Are defined, 2. Are repeated throughout the text. 3. If you only circled five key terms in the entire text, you would have a pretty good idea about what the entire text is about.

I have also asked students to circle the names of sources, power verbs, or figurative language.

Providing students with a specific thing you want them to underline or circle will focus their attention on that area much better than “underlining important information”.

4. Left margin: What is the author SAYING?

It isn’t enough to ask students to “write in the margins”. We must be very specific and give students a game plan for what they will write. This is where the chunking comes into play.

In the left margin, I ask my students to summarize each chunk. I demonstrate how to write summaries in 10-words or less. The chunking allows the students to look at the text in smaller segments and summarize what the author is saying in just that small, specific chunk.

5. Right margin: Dig deeper into the text

In the right-hand margin, I again direct my students to complete a specific task for each chunk. This may include:

- Use a power verb to describe what the author is DOING. (For example: Describing, illustrating, arguing, etc.) Note: It isn’t enough for students to write “Comparing” and be done. What is the author comparing? A better answer might be: “Comparing the character of Montag to Captain Beatty”.

- Represent the information with a picture. This is a good way for students to be creative to visually represent the chunk with a drawing.

- Ask questions. I have found this to be a struggle for many students, as they often say they don’t have any questions to ask. When modeled, students can begin to learn how to ask questions that dig deeper into the text. I often use these questions as the conversation driver in Socratic Seminar.

To ensure our students are college and career ready, we must teach them critical reading strategies in order for them to independently attack a text. They must learn how to own a text, rather than letting the text own them. After following these steps, students have read the text at least five times and they are actively interacting with the text. This is a much different experience than skimming through a text one time with a highlighter in hand.
CLOSE READERS

DO THESE THINGS

- Read the text slowly at least twice
- Get the gist of what the text is about
- Circle words you aren't sure of and try to figure them out
- Reread, annotate, and underline key vocabulary
- Use the text to answer questions
- Gather evidence from the text
- Talk with each other about what you think it means
- Read again to summarize or answer specific questions

CLOSE READING STEPS

1st Read:
- What is the main topic or idea being presented?
- What is the author's purpose in sharing these ideas?

2nd Read:
- How does the author feel about the topic or idea?
- What words or phrases does the author use to convey his or her point of view?

3rd Read:
- How does the author's point of view influence how the topic is described?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shape content and style of a text.