

Draft Reading for Deeper Comprehension

By Nancy Spaniak

So many of our students attest to reading an assignment, but they cannot begin to discuss or write about its contents because they cannot remember much, if anything, of what they read. Their eyes go over the words on the page once, but for most students once is not enough. In order for them to think deeply about their texts, our students often need to read their assignments at least two times—and realize it's okay to do so.

The best readers read complex texts multiple times. Kelly Gallagher, in his book *Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts, 4-12*, calls this type of reading “draft reading.” Our students are certainly familiar with the concept of draft writing. They engage in the process whenever they compose a formal essay; therefore, using the term “draft reading” and instructing them in its stages frees them from this prevalent idea, “If I’ve read it once and I don’t get, then I’ll give up because I’ll never get it.” I explain the concept of “draft reading” to my students in the following way:

“Before we write, we engage in the process of brainstorming ideas. From that brainstormed information, we compose our first draft. Next, we revise our first draft, getting rid of some words and sentences and adding others, to produce a second draft. We may be satisfied with the second draft and call it done, or we may find it still needs some more work. We reread our piece, revise, and write a third draft. This process of revising our ideas and writing continues until we are satisfied with our finished product.

“Reading a textbook in ‘drafts’ is very similar to writing an essay in drafts. Our preview of the text is like a pre-writing brainstorm where we list what we already know about the topic and what we will learn. Our first draft reading helps us get the gist of the text, the main ideas. Our second draft reading focuses on important details to help us understand the main ideas and think about how all parts of the text fit together. While we read, we concentrate fully, thinking about what we already know and about what we need to learn; visualizing the information; and questioning ourselves—Why did this happen? What will happen next? And most importantly, do I understand this text? If we have trouble comprehending, we slow down and tackle a ‘third

draft’ reading—or even a fourth or fifth draft reading. We carefully study all charts, graphs, and pictures; read all captions; and make sure we know the definitions of the key vocabulary terms.

“By combining our draft reading with note taking, we become ‘engaged’ readers because we must evaluate all information to determine what is important enough to jot down. When we make these decisions, we bring our thinking to its highest cognitive level. Additionally, the physical motion of writing keeps us actively engaged in the material. We end up processing the information in

two ways, visually (through reading) and kinesthetically (through writing). Our efforts to retain the information are doubled. Finally, our written notes provide a summary of our reading. We can practice and review them over and over again to move the information into our long-term memory. Overall, thoughtful draft reading, combined with active note taking while we read, will assist us enormously in comprehending

and, ultimately, remembering what we read.”

Read-and-Say-Something is a great “first draft” reading technique because students will get the gist of the piece through their discussion. For the “second draft,” I have my students take Two-Column Notes as they re-read the text silently to themselves. Another idea is for students to fill out the “K” column of a K-W-L chart while they read a first draft independently; then, before tackling the second draft reading, they work in small groups to consolidate what they now know about the topic and to develop questions for the “W” column. As they “Read-and-Say-Something” during their second draft, they answer their “W” questions, develop further questions, and begin to complete the “L” column.

Linking the unfamiliar concept of “draft reading” with the familiar process of “draft writing” gives our students an essential understanding of reading as learning. Just as expert writers wouldn’t call their compositions complete after jotting down their first ideas, expert readers don’t call their reading finished until they have read a piece of text more than once in order to assure comprehension of its deeper meanings.



Source:

Gallagher, K. (2004). *Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts, 4-12*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

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