Teaching Technique 11

Active Reading Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY TYPE</th>
<th>TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED</th>
<th>LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading, Learning Assessment, Active/Engaged Learning</td>
<td>Insufficient Preparation, Surface Learning</td>
<td>Foundational Knowledge, Application: Critical Thinking, Learning How to Learn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Active Reading Documents

Active Reading Documents (ARD) are carefully prepared forms that guide students through the process of critical and careful reading.

1. Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for the ARD
2. Choose a reading assignment
3. Set assignment parameters (state the main idea, supporting details, etc.)
4. Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading
5. Communicate assignment instructions to students
6. Have students complete the ARD and submit for grading
7. Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness
Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

**STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS**

Students who come to class having done the assigned reading will most likely learn more than those who don’t, but getting students to prepare appropriately is one of the perennial problems in college teaching. Research indicates that most students simply don’t read at all, particularly when there are no immediate consequences for not doing so. Even students who have done the reading may just have skimmed it, not reading deeply enough to engage with the content in a way that will help them understand and process information for an upcoming class session. The result is that it is difficult for the teacher to know how best to target their lecture presentation because students will attend class with widely varying levels of preparedness.

*Active Reading Documents (ARDs)* are carefully prepared forms that guide students through the process of critical and careful reading. In particular, *ARDs* walk students through knowledge retrieval and comprehension since students must access and make sense of the new information to complete the document. *ARDs* can scaffold reading assignments so that students read at more sophisticated levels of comprehension and critical analysis. They not only help students prepare for a given session, but they also help students develop careful reading skills that can be used in other contexts. *ARDs* also provide teachers with an artifact that can be evaluated and count toward the course grade, which can motivate students to do the preparatory work out-of-class and at an appropriate level.

**STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK’S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT**

An *Active Reading Document* is a prepared form that guides students through the process of critical and careful reading.

**STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS**

- Prior to coming to class, choose a reading assignment.
- Create a handout with corresponding tasks for the reading assignment, such as:
  - State the main idea of the reading.
  - State the key supporting arguments, etc.
STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

Choose how you wish to assess or grade the completed ARD. For example, a plus, check, or minus may be sufficient for a simple ARD, while you may want to create a rubric for more complex ones that require sophisticated levels of thinking and analysis.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

Distribute the ARD handout or post it in the assignment section of your course’s online LMS.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

- Distribute the Active Reading Document.
- Assign the reading and ask students to bring their ARDs to the next class session.
- Collect the document.
- Assess and grade the document.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?
- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?
- Was it appropriate for the students?
- Did the technique keep the students engaged?
- Did it promote student learning?
- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.
Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how Elizabeth Barkley adapted Active Reading Documents in her course, *Music of Multicultural America*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.
Technique Template

Sample Active Reading Document Completed Technique Template:
Content from Elizabeth Barkley

Music of Multicultural America

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS
What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

My course is an on campus, Honors Institute section of a lower division General Education course. The course meets my institution’s United States Cultures & Communities requirement and also the Humanities requirement. It enrolls about 25-30 students. A significant number are international students and we are also trying to recruit more first generation students. As members of the Honors Institute, these students tend to have good academic skills.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS
Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

I am looking for an activity that will help ensure students do the assigned reading prior to the class lecture so that I can focus in the lecture on application of the information in the reading to real music examples. This way I can use valuable class meeting time to help students connect ‘theory’ to ‘practice.’
STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK’S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

I will create an ARD that will be used for each chapter that asks students to: 1) summarize the historical and social context of the chapter’s music genre; 2) describe the structural characteristics (rhythm, melody, form, etc.), 3) describe the main stylistic categories, and 4) identify and describe three key musicians.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

I will create the template so that it applies to all chapters and will inform students that they need to download and print the template out for each chapter and then submit it at the beginning of the class that corresponds to the reading as indicated in the Syllabus.
STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/-/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

I will use a simple +/-/check/- next to each template box, and then award 5 points for each +, 3 for a check, and 0 for a minus based on the following criteria: the answer is a minimum of 75 words, it uses appropriate college-level language and grammar, and it is a thoughtful and accurate response to the prompt.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

I will include instructions in the Syllabus under “Learning Activities and Assessments” and then I will post the ARD template in the course’s LMS. I’ll note in the Calendar of Deadlines when each of the ARDs are due and collect them at the beginning of the corresponding class.
**STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE**

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

Students will be responsible for printing and filling out the template and bringing it to class on the due date. I will not accept late submissions. I am going to first try insisting that students fill out the ARD by hand, so that they don’t just copy/paste. Then I will have a discussion with them to see if we should accept ARDs that have been filled out through a word processing program.

**STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS**

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

After implementation, I found that students were coming to class much better prepared, which allowed class time to be used for more advanced learning. I also held a discussion about students’ perception of the ARD’s usefulness and the general consensus was that they took work, but that they did ensure students did the reading. Students also felt they made excellent study guides for exams. I will definitely continue using this technique.
Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement Active Reading Documents in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor’s Guide to assist you in your thinking.

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS
What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS
Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?
STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK’S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT
What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS
What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?
STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING
If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/-check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS
How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?
STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE
How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS
*Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.*
Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?
References and Resources

PRIMARY SOURCE
Content for this download was drawn primarily from “Interactive Lecture Technique 1: Active Reading Document.” Barkley, E. F. and Major, C. H. (2018). Interactive Lecturing: A Handbook for College Faculty. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, pp. 200–203. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in online and on campus courses, see the primary source:


CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING


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