

Exploring a College Textbook

Overview

Description

This assignment asks students to investigate a college textbook.

Final Product: Students will write a 2-page analysis of the textbook used in the exercise. They will analyze the textbook's organization and its methods of presenting information as well as discuss strategies a reader might use to comprehend and remember material from this text. Students will also write a paragraph that synthesizes information found on one content page of the textbook.

Subject

English IV, Cross-Disciplinary

Task Level

Grade 12

Objectives

Students will:

- Explain how to use a variety of textbook features to increase their understanding of the information the textbook contains, including such features as:
 - Title page
 - Copyright Page
 - Author's biography
 - Preface
 - Introduction
 - Table of contents
 - Headings and subheadings in the body of the text
 - Graphics and other visuals
 - Index
 - Glossary
 - Appendices
 - Web and other ancillary materials

- Develop concrete strategies for understanding and reviewing significant information from the textbook.
- Synthesize information presented on one content page of the textbook, preferably a page that includes a graphic or other visual.

Preparation

- Prepare student copies of the Student Notes and the *Exploring A College Textbook* handout.
- Attempt to obtain multiple copies of four to eight college textbooks (depending on class size). Ideally, the books used for this assignment will derive from a range of different disciplines or college “majors” (e.g., sociology, nursing, marketing, biology, economics), but the members of each smaller group will work with multiple copies of the same book.
 - Up-to-date lists of currently used textbooks may be obtained from university bookstores or their websites. For example, the textbook page of the University of Texas at Austin bookstore can be accessed via the following URL: <http://www.universitycoop.com/info/shop-for-books>.¹
 - Your school librarian may be able to help you obtain textbooks either through interlibrary loan or by purchasing books. For this assignment, earlier editions of recently reissued textbooks, which can often be purchased relatively cheaply online, may be appropriate, but no book should be used more than seven years after its most recent copyright date. You may also be able to obtain college textbooks by borrowing from a local college or university or by requesting examination copies or temporary online access from large publishers (especially if your school or district already purchases other texts from the publisher).
 - If you are unable to obtain college-level textbooks, you should use the most advanced textbooks that are locally available, for example those used in an AP or other advanced class taught at your school. It is also acceptable to ask each student to select a textbook he or she is currently using for a challenging or advanced class. Even if a student is already familiar with some of the content in a textbook the student already possesses, he or she has probably not consciously examined the textbook’s different sections and thought about how to use them singly or in combination to obtain information beyond the specific pages an instructor has assigned.

¹ In the “course menu” box, select a semester. A pull-down menu of the university departments will appear. If you click on a department such as economics or sociology, a menu of courses being offered that semester will appear. If you then click on an introductory level course (usually one near the top of the list), names of instructors will appear. Click on an instructor and then click the (+) sign next to the instructor’s name. Perform this procedure for courses in several disciplines. Finally, click on “FIND BOOKS FOR THESE COURSES.” A list of texts will appear towards the bottom of your screen.

- Finally, adjust the student instructions and handout so that these documents accurately reflect the level or type of textbooks your students will use.

Prior Knowledge

- Students should be comfortable using word processing software and have prior understanding of and practice in all parts of the writing process, including invention, drafting, revision, and proofreading.
- Students should be able to write accurate and concise summaries.
- Students should be able to identify and explain the function of major features of a high school textbook, such as the title page, copyright page, author's biography, preface, introduction, table of contents, index, and glossary.

Key Concepts and Terms

- Ancillary materials
- Appendix / Appendices
- Copyright
- Graphics
- Glossary
- Index
- Introduction
- Layout
- Preface
- Preview
- Supplemental materials
- Synthesize
- Title page
- Visuals

Time Frame

At least one hour should be allotted for introducing the assignment and allowing students to work in small groups to identify and discuss the features found in their chosen textbooks. Students should then spend another hour of class time independently filling out the *Exploring a Textbook Worksheet* handout. Students' written analyses and synthetic paragraphs should take approximately three additional hours; students may perform this step either in class or, if they are allowed to take the textbooks with them, outside of class.

Instructional Plan

Getting Started

Learning Objectives

Students will identify and begin to explore features of informational textbooks including:

- Title page
- Copyright page
- Preface
- Introduction
- Author's biography
- Table of contents
- Chapter titles
- Chapter outlines, overviews, or summaries
- Graphics or other visuals
- Glossary
- Appendices
- Index
- Internet resources and other ancillary materials

Procedure

1. Divide students into groups, and arrange for groups to select a textbook to explore in depth or assign a textbook to them. If you have not been able to obtain multiple copies of the same textbook, try to group students with textbooks in the same or related academic disciplines together (e.g., marketing and economics). Alternatively, instruct students to use a current textbook from one of their own more advanced classes (see Preparation, above).
2. Within their groups, students will then look at the various features of their chosen textbooks, examining and taking notes on the types of information each feature (title page, preface, introduction, glossary, etc., as listed above) communicates.

Investigating

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Understand the purpose of each textbook feature and how it contributes to their understanding of the information contained in the text.

Procedure

1. Each group should use its selected textbook as the basis for discussing the *Exploring a College Textbook Worksheet*.
2. Students should complete their worksheets individually.

Drawing Conclusions

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze the organizational structure of a textbook and develop a reading strategy based on their analysis.
- Synthesize information presented on a page or two of the textbook, preferably a page that includes a graphic or other visual.

Procedure

1. Have students write a 2-page analysis of the textbook, based on the observations they recorded in their *Exploring a College Textbook Worksheet* handouts. They should explain how the different features of the text work together to convey information and discuss any strategies a reader might use to understand and review material from this text. Students may also make suggestions on how to improve the textbook's structure or organization.
2. Have students write a 1-paragraph synthetic summary of information presented on a page or two of the textbook, preferably a part that includes a graphic or other visual. Students should not simply copy from any summaries already provided by the textbook's authors.

Scaffolding/Instructional Support

The goal of scaffolding is to provide support to encourage student success, independence, and self-management. Instructors can use these suggestions, in part or all together, to meet diverse student needs. The more skilled the student, however, the less scaffolding that he or she will need. Some examples of scaffolding that could apply to this assignment include:

- Providing feedback to groups as they work.
- Providing more guidance for students who have trouble with sections of the worksheet asking for analysis or reasoning.
- Allowing students to work in pairs or groups to complete the worksheet.
- Allowing students to work in pairs or groups to understand and/or synthesize the information provided in the textbook. Each student should still write his or her own paragraph, however.
- Eliminating the part of the assignment that requires students to synthesize the information provided on one content page of the textbook.

The suggestions provided here are intended to address problems you may encounter when using this assignment or when evaluating student work associated with it. All assessment factors should be made clear to students at the beginning of the lesson:

- Advise students that this assignment sequence will be of value only if they treat it as an intellectual challenge and not as an occasion for hasty, formulaic responses.
- Consider the following factors when evaluating student performance on this assignment:
 - The extent to which a student participates in his or her group's discussion of the features of the textbook.
 - The extent to which the student and his or her group focused on the textbook and used the *Exploring a College Textbook Worksheet* to guide discussion, instead of drifting to other topics.
 - The thoroughness and accuracy of the student's answers on the worksheet. For example, does the student note specific page numbers from the textbook where appropriate?
 - The thoroughness and accuracy of the student's 2-page analysis of the textbook's structure, including the degree to which the analysis demonstrates the student's grasp of how the features of the textbook work *together* to convey information. Does the student's analysis note the plausibility and practicality of the reading strategies he or she is highlighting?
 - The thoroughness and accuracy of the student's one-paragraph synthesis of textbook content.

- Circulating among the groups as they discuss the worksheets will help to familiarize you with the textbooks each group is using and help you to evaluate the thoroughness and accuracy of the students' written work.
- You can also make the task of assessing students' worksheets and one-paragraph syntheses more efficient by rewriting questions 4 and 5 on the worksheet to direct each group to a specific small unit of the textbook you have already chosen for that group. Identifying a small unit in each textbook in advance will make it easier for you to evaluate students' work.

TCCRS Cross-Disciplinary Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Key Cognitive Skills</i>			
B.3. Gather evidence to support arguments, findings, or lines of reasoning.	✓	✓	✓
D.3. Strive for accuracy and precision.	✓	✓	✓
D.4. Persevere to complete and master tasks.	✓	✓	✓
<i>II. Foundational Skills</i>			
A.1. Use effective prereading strategies.	✓	✓	✓
A.2. Use a variety of strategies to understand the meanings of new words.	✓	✓	✓
A.4. Identify the key information and supporting details.	✓	✓	✓
A.5. Analyze textual information critically.	✓	✓	✓
A.7. Adapt reading strategies according to structure of texts.	✓	✓	✓
B.1. Write clearly and coherently using standard writing conventions.		✓	✓
C.5. Synthesize and organize information effectively.		✓	✓

TCCRS English/Language Arts Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Writing</i>			
A.1. Determine effective approaches, forms, and rhetorical techniques that demonstrate understanding of the writer's purpose and audience.		✓	✓
A.2. Generate ideas and gather information relevant to the topic and purpose, keeping careful records of outside sources.	✓	✓	✓

A.3. Evaluate relevance, quality, sufficiency, and depth of preliminary ideas and information, organize material generated, and formulate a thesis.	✓	✓	✓
A.4. Recognize the importance of revision as the key to effective writing. Each draft should refine key ideas and organize them more logically and fluidly, use language more precisely and effectively, and draw the reader to the author's purpose.			✓
A.5. Edit writing for proper voice, tense, and syntax, assuring that it conforms to standard English, when appropriate.			✓
<i>II. Reading</i>			
A.2. Use text features and graphics to form an overview of informational texts and to determine where to locate information.	✓	✓	✓
A.5. Analyze the presentation of information and the strength and quality of evidence used by the author, and judge the coherence and logic of the presentation and the credibility of an argument.	✓	✓	✓
<i>III. Speaking</i>			
B.2 Participate actively and effectively in group discussions.	✓	✓	✓
<i>IV. Listening</i>			
B.3 Listen actively and effectively in group discussions.	✓	✓	✓

TEKS Standards Addressed

Exploring a College Textbook - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading

110.34.b.1. Reading/Vocabulary Development. Students understand new vocabulary and use it when reading and writing. Students are expected to:

- 110.34.b.1.A. Determine the meaning of technical academic English words in multiple content areas (e.g., science, mathematics, social studies, the arts) derived from Latin, Greek, or other linguistic roots and affixes.
- 110.34.b.1.B. Analyze textual context (within a sentence and in larger sections of text) to draw conclusions about the nuance in word meanings.
- 110.34.b.1.E. Use general and specialized dictionaries, thesauri, histories of language, books of quotations, and other related references (printed or electronic) as needed.

Exploring a College Textbook - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading

110.34.b.9. Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about expository text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.9.A. Summarize a text in a manner that captures the author's viewpoint, its main ideas, and its elements without taking a position or expressing an opinion.

110.34.b.11. Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Procedural Texts. Students understand how to glean and use information in procedural texts and documents. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.11.A. Draw conclusions about how the patterns of organization and hierarchic structures support the understandability of text.

110.34.b.11.B. Evaluate the structures of text (e.g., format, headers) for their clarity and organizational coherence and for the effectiveness of their graphic representations.

110.34.b.13. Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Students are expected to:

110.34.b.13.A. Plan a first draft by selecting the correct genre for conveying the intended meaning to multiple audiences, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea.

110.34.b.7.B. Structure ideas in a sustained and persuasive way (e.g., using outlines, note taking, graphic organizers, lists) and develop drafts in timed and open-ended situations that include transitions and the rhetorical devices to convey meaning.

110.34.b.7.C. Revise drafts to clarify meaning and achieve specific rhetorical purposes, consistency of tone, and logical organization by rearranging the words, sentences, and paragraphs to employ tropes (e.g., metaphors, similes, analogies, hyperbole, understatement, rhetorical questions, irony), schemes (e.g., parallelism, antithesis, inverted word order, repetition, reversed structures), and by adding transitional words and phrases.

110.34.b.7.D. Edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling.

110.34.b.7.E. Revise final draft in response to feedback from peers and teacher and publish written work for appropriate audiences.

110.34.b.18. Oral and Written Conventions/Handwriting, Capitalization, and Punctuation. Students write legibly and use appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions. Students are expected to correctly and consistently use conventions of punctuation and capitalization.

110.34.b.19. Oral and Written Conventions/Spelling. Students spell correctly. Students are expected to spell correctly, including using various resources to determine and check correct spellings.

Exploring a College Textbook

Introduction

The textbooks that you have used for the past 12 years of public school have been carefully written, not only by specialists in each subject area, such as chemistry or history, but also by reading specialists who have made sure that each text is written in a manner and style appropriate for students in a particular grade. A first-grade science book, for example, looks much different than a third-grade science book. A science book used in middle school looks much different from the high school chemistry or physics book. These differences are carefully monitored by state and local textbook committees to ensure that you get textbooks appropriate for your age, grade, and knowledge of subject matter.

College-level textbooks are written by experts in the subject matter being taught, but they are not always edited for a specific grade level. It is also common for each college professor to select books for his or her class; the professor will select a book that has the appropriate information, but he or she may not be particularly mindful of whether the book is clearly written or whether the information is easily accessible to students. For these and other reasons listed below, your strategies for dealing with textbook material must change when you enter college.

In college courses, textbooks can play a different role than they do in high school classes. Your professor may give you lengthy reading assignments on material never covered during lectures or class discussions. Such material may show up on quizzes and tests. Therefore, you will need to know how to study and learn directly from the textbook as well as how to use the textbook to review material you have learned. Because many professors will not provide much guidance in using textbooks, you must learn to independently assess the organization and features of textbooks, and develop your own reading strategies for understanding the information you will be responsible for.

You will pay big bucks for your textbooks – value them! Because you own them, you can annotate and mark them up to suit your own needs, so do plan to write and highlight in your books. Purchasing used textbooks can be a good way to save money if the books have not been annotated too heavily by previous owners. Most digital textbooks can also be annotated.

This assignment will give you an opportunity to analyze the features and organization of a textbook and to develop some conscious strategies for understanding the content. You will also practice synthesizing the information presented in a small section of the textbook.

Directions

Getting Started

1. Your instructor will explain what college textbooks are available for this assignment. If you and your group have the opportunity to choose among several options, you should try to select a book whose subject matter your group finds intriguing and whose level of difficulty seems challenging but not insurmountable.
2. You and your group should examine the textbook's various features and sections, and note the type of information each provides. Important features of your chosen textbook may include:
 - Title page
 - Preface
 - Introduction
 - Author's biography
 - Table of contents
 - Copyright page
 - Chapter titles
 - Chapter outlines, overviews, or summaries
 - Graphics or other visuals
 - Glossary
 - Appendices
 - Index
 - Internet resources and other ancillary materials

Investigating

1. Use the textbook you have selected as the basis for a small group discussion of the handout, *Exploring A College Textbook Worksheet*.
2. After the discussion, each of you should fill out the worksheet on your own using ideas gained from the group discussion.

Drawing Conclusions

1. Based on your responses to the *Exploring A College Textbook Worksheet*, write a 2-page analysis of the selected text. How do the different features of the textbook work together to convey information? What strategies would you

recommend to a reader who wishes to understand and review information contained in this textbook? If you have any suggestions for how the authors of the textbook might improve its structure, organization, or means of presenting information in a future edition, feel free to share them.

2. Write an additional paragraph in which you synthesize and summarize information presented on a page or two of the textbook, preferably one that includes a graphic or other visual as well as text. You should not simply copy from any summaries provided by the textbook's authors.

Exploring a College Textbook Worksheet

1. List the title, author(s), publisher, and copyright date of the textbook.

2. Read your book's preface and introduction. How do they differ, and what seems to be the function of each? Write down something significant that you learned from the preface and something significant that you learned from the introduction. For instance, where and how do the book's authors explain why the information the book contains is important for students to learn? Where and how do they describe their general approach to the topic? If the book is a new edition of a previously published textbook, what new features or information do the authors say have been added and why? When answering these questions, do not replicate information you have provided in response to other questions on this worksheet.

3. Most textbooks are divided into parts or sections, which are themselves often subdivided into smaller parts or sections. Using the table of contents, explain how the authors of the textbook divided and subdivided the information presented. For instance, what is the largest unit of division called—part? section? chapter? Within these largest units of division, how many additional levels of subdivision have been used? What principle or logic do the textbook's authors seem to have used in choosing how to divide the information the textbook presents?

