

## Reading Reflections: A Simple Activity for Fostering Metacognition and Lifelong Learning

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In an increasingly complex and interconnected world it is ever more important that students develop intellectual and practical skills for lifelong learning. A panel report by the AAC&U (2002) calls for “higher education to help college students become intentional learners who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources, and continue learning throughout their lives.” Becoming an intentional learner includes “developing self-awareness about the reason for study, the learning process itself, and how education is used.” Intentional, or “expert,” learners are more purposeful, they are more aware of themselves as learners, and they “take the initiative to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select an implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes” (Savin-Baden and Major 2004). Research on cognition and learning (Bransford et al., 2000) indicates that expert learners typically demonstrate better-developed metacognitive knowledge (about the learner, learning tasks, learning strategies, and content), metacognitive control (planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation), and reflection (coordinating link between knowledge and control of learning process; Ertmer and Newby, 1996). If an important goal of higher education is to help students become intentional learners, then our curricula should reflect those aims. Instruction about metacognitive knowledge and skills need not “displace” disciplinary content, but instead can be used to support learning of content (Lovett, 2008). In this paper we describe a simple metacognitive activity that can be implemented in nearly all courses within any discipline.

Students submit online reading reflections (e.g., using Blackboard or Moodle) after completing a reading assignment and before coming to class. In each reflection, students summarize the important concepts of the reading and describe what was interesting, surprising, or confusing to them. Instructors can respond to the reflections individually online, or in aggregate in the classroom. The instructor can also use the student reflections for ‘just-in-time’ planning and design of classroom activities. The reading reflections not only encourage students to read regularly before class, they also promote content mastery and foster student development of monitoring, self-evaluation, and reflection skills. Although reading reflections constitute only a small fraction (5-10%) of total points in our courses in economics and geology, they are excellent predictors of final course grades ( $r^2 > 0.70$ ) in all of the courses where we have implemented them. These results support the notion that improving students’ monitoring, self-evaluation, and reflection skills will enhance their learning.

### References

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