

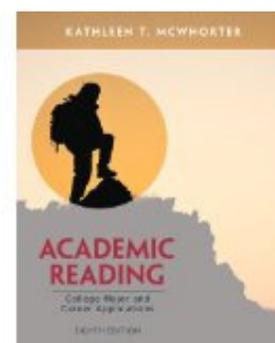


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***Academic Reading: College Major and Career Applications*
8th ed. (2013)**

Kathleen T. McWhorter
Pearson Education
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Academic Reading (AR) is one volume in the three-book series that, as claimed by McWhorter (2013), focuses on a ‘comprehensive approach’ to academic reading. With an aim to help college students to develop essential academic reading abilities, AR particularly emphasizes reading strategies and skills that could be adapted to teach students from various academic disciplines. It focuses on developing students’ reading comprehension, vocabulary, and critical thinking skills, as well as how to transfer these skills to their own specific academic disciplines. According to the author, this book uses methodologies that aim to enhance active reading skills, higher-order thinking skills, metacognitive awareness, and the ability to integrate reading and writing skills. A closer look at the contents of the book reveals that the author has built on some of Smith’s (1994) views on the top-down approach by concentrating on the importance of context and schema in constructing meaning while reading. The book is designed to provide explicit knowledge on reading strategies that students can apply when they read. The book has also drawn on some of the principles of the New Literacy Approaches to reading (see Hudson, 2007) in that reading and writing are connected to each other.

Organized in four parts, the author highlights the importance for the student to learn to be an interactive and critical reader. The first part of the book, which includes three chapters, mainly focuses on the fundamental reading strategies. Chapter 1 particularly illustrates and provides information on how to become an active reader and concentrate on reading. In addition, this chapter explicitly demonstrates the application of Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy of the levels of thinking into academic reading and some key reading strategies—previewing and predicting textbooks and non-textbooks, developing guide questions, checking comprehension, and applying SQ3R (i.e., a strategy to increase retention of information: survey, question, read, recite, and review). Chapter 2 focuses on enhancing students’ fundamental comprehension skills. In this chapter, the author highlights how to locate main ideas, identify topic sentences, locate implied main ideas, verify whether the details are primary or secondary, and adjust their reading rate to meet the demands for comprehension. Emphasizing vocabulary-learning strategies, Chapter 3 provides vocabulary development techniques such as using the right dictionary, index cards, context clues, word parts and mapping, and learning specialized and scientific vocabulary. All in all, the first part of the book certainly emphasizes the metacognitive strategies on becoming an active reader.

The second part of the book consists of three chapters that focus on critical reading strategies. In Chapter 4, the author provides strategies to make inferences while reading, assess the qualifications of the author, distinguish facts and opinions, identify the author's purpose, evaluate the data and evidence, analyze the writer's tone, annotate while reading, and synthesize ideas after reading. Unlike Chapter 4 in which the emphasis is on the author's message, Chapter 5 stresses the importance of evaluating the author's techniques or styles. The chapter focuses on what is, and how to recognize, connotative language, figurative language, and author's bias. It further explains how to discover missing information in readings, evaluate the author's generalizations, identify assumptions, and recognize manipulative language. Chapter 6 focuses on evaluating an author's arguments and includes definitions, parts, and types of argument. It then provides information on how to read the author's arguments effectively, evaluate evidence in reading arguments, and recognize errors in logical reasoning. In short, this part of the book helps learners develop how to view and respond to the readings critically, thus making the reading their own.

The third part of the book, which concentrates on academic reading strategies, also includes three chapters. Chapter 7 introduces and illustrates the ways to apply patterns of thought (i.e., patterns of ideas), definition (i.e., patterns of newly introduced terminologies), classification (i.e., patterns for categories), sequence (i.e., patterns of text organization), cause and effect relationships, comparison and contrast, and listing (i.e., patterns of enumeration), as well as other useful patterns of organization such as clarifications, summaries, examples, and additions. Chapter 8 emphasizes the technical aspects for academic reading and provides students with information on how to read and evaluate graphics and online sources. In addition, this chapter also emphasizes helping students to avoid plagiarizing online information. Chapter 9 highlights the strategies on integrating writing skills to improve reading comprehension, using annotation techniques to improve reading skills, taking notes to organize, synthesize, and retain ideas, using mapping to organize and find thought patterns, and adopting summarizing skills to increase recall ability. As mentioned above, this part of the book tends to follow much of the New Literacy Approach (Hudson, 2007, pp. 55-57) in that there is an emphasis on reading and writing integration.

The fourth part of the book includes six chapters that review each strategy for specific disciplines (Social Sciences, Business, Liberal Arts, Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Technical and Applied Fields). Each chapter emphasizes different disciplines but the strategies taught share similarities. Each chapter concentrates on introducing each discipline and provides students with various reasons and tips for studying a particular discipline. Each chapter also includes specialized reading techniques, thought patterns, and test-taking tips for students in specific disciplines. Though this part of the book can be useful for college students, I think this would best be on a website for individualized instruction.

In its 464 pages, the book opens each chapter with a visual aid that helps learners think about the topic, and with learning goals that orient and prepare them to read the chapters. Then, there are sections that link the topic of the chapter with academic and career settings followed by how it is linked. The author makes clear about why students are learning particular reading strategies and topics, and how it can be relevant to the learners. Throughout the section, the tips for specific disciplines, added on the left and right margins, provide information on how to use the strategies for the particular discipline. A self-test summary section highlights the learning goals for the chapter with a question and answer to its goals. The section includes one reading passage for students to practice and develop reading skills by making them think and answer pre-reading questions, carry out vocabulary and comprehension exercises, and respond to critical discussion and learning strategy questions. In short, the organization of the book is very reader-friendly and easily applicable to both teachers and students.

The activities in this textbook do not coincide with the conventional second language

(L2) reading textbooks, which typically contain myriads of reading comprehension and vocabulary exercises. Instead, this book is very much lecture-oriented and discipline-specific in that a specific reading strategy and concept is introduced and taught, and one or two following activities are included for students to practice the strategy or concept. In other words, this book is more concentrated on developing the students' macro-level reading skills such as metacognitive and critical aspects rather than micro-level skills such as linguistic aspects.

One of the most important aspects of this textbook is that it explicitly provides “survival techniques” that are relevant for college-level academic readers. As this textbook is discipline-sensitive and focuses on metacognitive reading strategies, it helps teachers develop reading courses that could aid college students to be able to efficiently and effectively cope with large volumes of academic text. In addition, the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies emphasized throughout the book is considered, as noted by Guo and Roehrig (2011), “a component of general knowledge that may be transferred from [first language (L1)] to L2 reading” (p. 43) unless their L2 language knowledge (i.e., vocabulary and syntactic awareness) are below a particular threshold. Considering this, there seems to be a place in which this book can play an important role for advanced L2 learners.

Furthermore, as with the upgrade to eighth edition, the book has been improved from two-color (7th version) to a four-color design, which I believe helps readers understand the organization and format of the text better. The other advantages of this book, particularly for the eighth edition, are the new learning goals that are associated with the chapter headings and topics (which provide general expectations of the chapters), practical overview of each academic discipline in Chapters 10 through 15 (e.g., brief definition of the discipline and annotations of the field), newly added reading selections (100 current and high-interest passages), and extensive updates of in-chapter passages and excerpts that correspond to more engaging and contemporary materials from various academic disciplines. In addition, the “Academic Success Section” (pp. 1-26), which discusses learning tips for college, has been revised to be more interactive with new strategies on managing electronic applications—cell phones, e-mail, text messaging, and so on.

In general, this book can be an important resource for college teachers as it contains how to teach reading strategies that current college students should have in order to understand the different nature of academic texts, but I feel that more attention could have been paid on adapting the material in the book for L2 learners. For instance, this book does not consider the fact that there is a difference between L1 and L2 reading strategies. The strategies for using L1 for learning L2 vocabulary, such as the use of L1 mnemonics, can be a significant strategy or skill for L2 learners. Moreover, this book seems to be focusing too much on reading strategies and lacking not only reading activities for learners to practice, but also the affective aspects for reading. Day and Bamford (1998) note that affective dimensions of language learning such as attitude and motivation play an essential role for leading and sustaining learners to be autonomous readers.

To sum up, as a college-level L2 reading teacher and user of this book for teaching, I believe it is a great book for college students who are motivated in learning reading strategies and also for the L2 learners who have a high English proficiency level. However, teachers should provide L2 students with additional support to use their L1 reading strategies while reading L2.

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