

# GET STUDENTS READING!

A Teaching Resource from the Walker Center for Teaching and Learning



## **TROUBLE WITH STUDENTS NOT READING?**

**Reading is a major way to convey information. But what if students either can't or won't do the assigned reading?**

**Surely, there must be a better way!**

**UTC faculty offer practical guidance for inviting students to become engaged readers.**

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# GET STUDENTS READING!

## THERE ARE MANY STRATEGIES!



**Questions to Answer:** A simple approach is to give students questions to answer from the reading so that they have motivation to keep reading to find the answers. This can help direct their reading.

**Concept Map:** Students can be asked to develop a concept map, placing key concepts in circles and indicating relationships by lines and labels. This requires them to read in order to understand the concept well enough to complete this assignment. This task could either be individual or group work.



**Study Guide:** Some textbooks may also have an accompanying study guide, and students can be graded on completion of the study guide for the assigned chapter(s). This will guide their reading and motivate students to do the reading in order to complete the study guide questions. Students did this in one of my undergraduate courses and turned in their study guides on the day of the test.

**Create Test Questions:** Students could be asked to create some test questions from the chapter readings as an assignment.

**Teach a Concept:** Students could also be asked to teach a concept to the class. This might be a group assignment and would also require the students to do the reading well in order to fully understand and teach the concept.

## Meet the Faculty



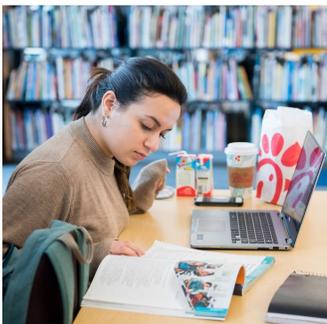
**Leslie Moro**

**Nursing**

# GET STUDENTS READING!

## READING WILL DRAMATICALLY INCREASE!

**It's a Puzzle:** One thing that really surprises me is the fact that not even my upper division English students do the reading if I do not “force” them to do it. I still do not know why, time management? General unwillingness? But be that as it may, this is a problem.



**Authentic Texts:** I usually approach readings this way. Although I use a textbook, I primarily assign authentic contemporary texts to my students. Because I teach the History of English, many texts are medieval texts, which are sometimes quite difficult to tackle. I ask my students to read them once without any guidelines, to approach the text without any specific outside influence. I also provide guided reading questions to help my students identify the concepts I focus on.

### Meet the Faculty



**Dominik Heinrici**

**English**

**Reading Quiz:** Before I discuss the readings in class, I give a reading quiz. For two semesters, I tried without these quizzes — without success. I then discuss the texts in class. However, I do not see myself as a solo entertainer, and I can't have a productive discussion if they did not do their part. After some time, I see that my students discover why I assign specific texts, and about one-third into the semester the motivation for actually reading dramatically increases.

# GET STUDENTS READING!

## A BIT BETTER PREPARED

**Interactive Platform:** Comprehension is tough. It's not a skill that we learn; it's a skill that we always have to polish. It's especially hard on students who may struggle with a learning disability or just simply don't know how to read for comprehension. I've been able to develop an interactive platform with the help of the textbook's publisher to do just that. I've used two different publishers who have been able to use their existing student database and customize it to what I'd like to accomplish in my classes. I use a game-based assignment where students can obtain page references for the questions they are having a tough time with.



### Meet the Faculty



**R.J. Groh**

**Political Science  
& Public Services**

Even if they are only reading to pass the assignment, it's still a bit better than not reading at all. It's not a perfect process and a score of 100% is very easy to earn. But I noticed that my students were coming a bit better prepared to class for discussion. This free resource (for students who purchase the book) and publishers are just so happy to have you use their product. They were pleased customize this for me.

# GET STUDENTS READING!

## CARROT AND STICK

This is always an issue for me and so I'm always looking for new tips. I've come up with a couple tools to help me, and this semester (at least so far) they seem to be working a little bit.

**Read for the Big Ideas:** During the first couple weeks of class, I regularly check in with them about how much time they're spending each day on the reading. I want them to get to the point where they are only investing 30-40 minutes a day on reading. I've tried to design the class so that is possible. I am very explicit about that expectation, and I also explain to them how I want them to read: for main ideas and evidence, not to remember every word that they read. I think that it is challenging for some students to let go of reading as memorization, but I find that's not practical for college and I'm not sure it's a useful skill for their professional lives. Instead, I want them to be able to find the big ideas fast, and so I try to get them headed in that direction.

**Checking-in:** Second (more of the stick), I have weekly unannounced reading quizzes that could happen any class day. Generally, I try to hold these at the end of the week, so that they feel that they have to read for every class period. These are really simple, often multiple choice, and the point is not even to check that they understood the reading, just that they did it. I try to structure my class sessions (whether lecture or discussion) around making sense of the readings, so I don't need (or expect) them to make sense of it on their own. But in order for that approach to work, they have to have at least looked at the material, so that's what the quizzes are supposed to check.

It's definitely not a perfect system, and I think that I'll need to continue to develop my ideas and tactics as the semester goes along. But I've found some benefit from both of these techniques.

### Meet the Faculty



**Edward Brudney**

**History**

# GET STUDENTS READING!

## AT LEAST GLANCE AT THE MATERIAL!

In each of the classes that I teach, I urge students to come prepared to class. In fact, this is one of the things that I mention in my syllabus. Students often suggest that they don't have enough time to fully read the assigned chapters from the textbook. In response, I always make sure that I post the PowerPoint slides so that they can read the material beforehand. I also ask the students to skim and scan the material before coming to class. I tell them that when they at least glance the material before the class, this will help them to easily understand the concepts (as the material will be apparently more familiar) and promote discussion.

### Meet the Faculty



**Nilesah Sah**  
**Finance &  
Economics**

## CHALLENGED AND ENGAGED

### Meet the Faculty



**Christi Denton**  
**Nursing**

Reading is such an important part of my curriculum and it is so difficult to keep students engaged. I have integrated a weekly quiz over the reading material to ensure that they do not fall behind. In medicine, information moves quickly. I emphasize this fact by giving mini-lectures about breaking topics and let them know that the content is for their knowledge only; they will not be tested on the material. This helps them to understand that, as practitioners, the reading will always continue! The consumption of material is essential to their practice, and I try to set an important example of that practice. Often, if I can provoke them to have feelings on an issue, they read in order to support their views. If they are challenged and engaged, I hope that translates to increased consumption of the reading material.

# GET STUDENTS READING!

## MORE THAN JUST “LET’S TALK ABOUT THIS”!

**Teaching Each Other:** I often assign student groups to lead us in discussion of our texts (usually in the second unit of whatever the class is) — a project that requires a specific writing activity and a specific discussion activity (not just “let’s talk about this”). After the first group leads the discussion, it’s pretty clear to them that if they want their classmates to be engaged they themselves have to be engaged when they’re not leading the discussion. Inevitably, after the first group has finished, somebody makes a comment about everybody doing the reading — and it works.



### Meet the Faculty



**Karen Babine**

English

**Think Pieces:** I do three levels of writing in my classes: high stakes (major papers or creative work), low stakes, and no stakes (like writing exercises or freewriting). Think Pieces, turned in weekly, are low-stakes. Unless they’re short or are purely personal responses, it’s tough not to receive all the grading points. I don’t assign reading responses, as such, simply because I want to know what they think about what they’ve read, rather than “I could relate to this because my dog is also spotted.” These are not simply a written quiz for me to check on them and make sure they’ve done their reading — I want to know what they think. Often, these Think Pieces are the catalyst for discussion in the next class.

# GET STUDENTS READING!

## A NUMBER OF THINGS

I have done a number of things to get them reading. I am not sure I have found the perfect solution yet, or even if it is possible.



**Reading Quizzes:** I give my students pop quizzes over the readings. I typically have about 10 of these a semester, which corresponds to about half the number of readings they do. This works okay. However, I usually make the reading quizzes easy enough that those who did the reading but are nonetheless struggling with comprehension/understanding can still receive high marks. Unfortunately, that means some of the better students are able to effectively guess their way to a passing grade on the quiz.

**Calling on Random Students:** Calling students at random is something I do early on in the year. It works really well at first. Students are uncomfortable around their new classmates and seemingly do not want to be embarrassed. However, it only takes a few weeks before they all start to feel more comfortable in the course and have no problem with not being prepared. I have no idea how to keep that from happening.



## Meet the Faculty



**Jared Rosenberger**

**Sociology**

**Pick Your Own Reading:** This cannot be done with all topics, but if is feasible for subject matter that is well-researched. I have students find a peer-reviewed journal article related to our current topic and read it for class. Usually, I have them submit a summary of the article on Canvas as well. It seems that most students like this activity and gets them reading. I also find the discussion is better on those particular days, as they are more eager to share what they found.

# GET STUDENTS READING!

## SCANNING, SKIMMING, AND READING

When I ask my students to read books, they claim that they don't have enough time for that. So, I teach my students how an expert reads using some methods such as skimming and scanning. Skimming and scanning are two strategies for speed reading.

Skimming refers to looking only for the general or main ideas with materials. By contrast, when scanning you look only for a specific fact or piece of information without reading everything.

I strongly recommend my students to use these methods in order to anticipate the content of a particular reading and saving time. Using these methods, they can start at the beginning of a piece and already know its destination and have some idea of how it gets there. I ask them to take note for the main point of each chapter they've read and only jot down relevant information. Then, I form discussion groups to compare notes. Also, I ask questions to clarify certain elements.

### Meet the Faculty



**Ekran Kaplanoglu**

**Engineering  
Management &  
Technology**

## AVOIDING THE SAME MISTAKES

In the past, I have used graded assignments to compel them to read. They know there will be a discussion, and they know participation makes up part of their grade. They also know that any assigned reading may be subject to an in-class essay, in which they must answer a broad question about the reading. Usually, students can do pretty well by just proving they read, but deep thoughts are required to earn the best grades. Finally, they know that a portion of the test will cover readings and only the readings. In theory, they can earn at most 50% if they did all the readings and never came to class. This way, students can make mistakes and learn from their mistakes when they read something the first time, but they have an opportunity to avoid the same mistake on the test.

### Meet the Faculty



**Mark Johnson**

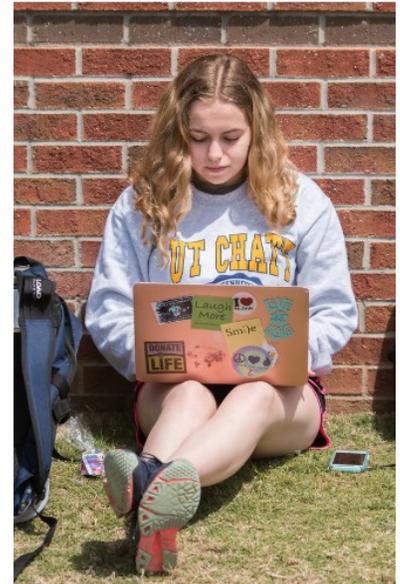
**History**

# GET STUDENTS READING!

## OF QUIZZES AND READING JOURNALS

If we want students to read, we have to hold them accountable for the readings. I use either reading quizzes or journals for this, depending on the format and level of the class.

**Online:** For online classes, quizzes on the readings are a must. To keep the grading manageable, I use only objective questions (true or false, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and matching) which Canvas can automatically grade. I keep the questions easy and straightforward, and I only ask a few (perhaps 5-10 depending on the length of the reading). I ask questions that get at the key points and major concepts. You can set up the quiz so students have unlimited attempts; they can go back and correct the answers to questions they may have missed. This approach can also work for traditional face-to-face classes. Simply have the quiz due by the beginning of class.



### Meet the Faculty



**Lucy Schultz**

**Philosophy**

**Face-to-Face:** For upper division, face-to-face courses, I have students turn in a reading journal on Canvas for every class period in which there is an assigned reading. This reading journal is one-page summary of the main points of the reading with a few reflections and/or questions provided by the student. These are due by the beginning of class. Often, several students will turn them in early enough that I can read many of them before I teach the material. I like this because I get a sense of how the students are responding to the material, what they are understanding, and what needs clarification, which helps me prepare for the class. This also encourages the students to digest the material a little more as they read, so they come to class more prepared as well.

# **THE WALKER CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING AT UTC**

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The mission of the Grayson H. Walker Center for Teaching and Learning is to promote teaching excellence and innovation that cultivates student engagement, learning, and success.

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### **TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT**

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