



Association
of American
Colleges and
Universities

Spring 2009 Draft for Public Release of Reading VALUE Rubric

This rubric is a step in a rubric development process that will produce a final draft by September 2009. All drafts are revised in response to the feedback received from VALUE Leadership and Partner campuses. The final feedback deadline for the VALUE Initiative is July 3, 2009. For more information or to give feedback, please email Wende Morgaine, VALUE Initiative Manager, at wendemm@gmail.com. Thank you!

The VALUE rubrics emerge from a process that examined many campus rubrics for each outcome and from the knowledge of faculty experts. They articulate fundamental criteria for each outcome demonstrated at progressively more sophisticated levels. The rubrics are intended primarily for institutional level use in evaluating and discussing student learning. The core expectations articulated in the VALUE rubrics can be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines or even courses. At the same time, the VALUE rubrics position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework that is shared nationally.

Framing Language

In the *Phaedrus* Plato recounted Socrates' warning about the risks of relying on written texts: "...[W]ith written words: you might think they spoke as though they made sense, but if you ask them anything about what they are saying, if you wish an explanation, they go on telling you the same thing, over and over forever."

Indeed, texts do not explain, nor answer questions about, themselves. They must be located, approached, decoded, comprehended, analyzed, interpreted, and discussed, especially complex academic texts used in university classrooms for purposes of learning. Historically, college professors have not considered the teaching of reading necessary other than as a "basic skill" in which students may require "remediation." They have assumed that students come with the ability to read and have placed responsibility for its absence on teachers in elementary and secondary schools.

We believe this absence of reading instruction in higher education must, can, and will change, and have prepared this rubric to mark a direction for this change. Why the change? For one thing, even the strongest, most experienced readers making the transition from high school to college have not learned what they need to know and do to make sense of texts in the context of professional and academic scholarship--to say nothing about readers who are either not as strong or as experienced. For another, readers mature and develop their repertoire of reading performances naturally during the undergraduate years and beyond as a consequence of meeting textual challenges; as Aristotle said, anything we do naturally can be improved upon with instruction. This rubric provides some initial steps toward finding ways to measure undergraduate students' progress along the continuum.

Later in the *Phaedrus* Plato has Socrates comment on the mistaken assumption that texts and readers enter into simple relationships: "Once a thing is put in writing, it rolls about all over the place, falling into the hands of those who have no concern with it just as easily as under the notice of those who comprehend." Our intention in creating this rubric is to support and promote the teaching of undergraduates as readers to take on increasingly higher levels of concerns with texts and to read as one of "those who comprehend."

College readers, as they move beyond their undergraduate experiences, should be motivated to approach texts and respond to them with a reflective level of curiosity and the ability to apply aspects of the texts they approach to a variety of aspects in their lives.

Glossary

- **Genre:** A particular kind of text defined by set of disciplinary conventions or agreements learned through participation in academic discourse governing what texts can be about, how they are structured, or work, what to expect from them, what can be done with them, how to use them (e.g. essays, textbook chapters, literary works, journal articles, lab reports, grant proposals, and literature reviews, for example.)
- **Analysis:** the process of recognizing and using the features of a text--its genre, its language, its stated purpose, and its structural layout, for example--to then build and rebuild its meaning.
- **Comprehension:** a deceptively complex term that defines the extent to which a reader "gets" the text, both literally and figuratively. The word itself involves the stem 'prehend', meaning literally 'seize.' Accomplished and sophisticated readers will have moved from being able to "get" the meaning that the language of the text its author chose provides to being able to "get" the implications of the text, the questions it raises, and the counterarguments one might suggest in response to it. A helpful and accessible discussion of 'comprehension' is found in Chapter 2 of the RAND report, *Reading for Understanding*: http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1465/MR1465.ch2.pdf.
- **Epistemological lens:** This term is used here with specific reference to the **knowledge framework** that a reader develops in a specific discipline as s/he moves through an academic major. The depth and breadth of this knowledge--whence the acuity of the lens--provides the foundation for independent and self-regulated responses to the range of texts in any discipline or field that students will encounter. Thus, we include *epistemological lens* as a term in the most advanced descriptor of the "Interpretation" criterion. A perspective--or set of perspectives characterized by sets of academic rules/guidelines/conventions within and, often, across disciplines that establish what counts as knowledge and how knowledge is made and warranted.
- **Interpretation:** Determining or construing the meaning of a text or part of a text in a particular way based on textual and contextual information.
- **Interpretive Strategies:** Purposeful approaches from different perspectives, which include, for example, asking clarifying questions, building knowledge of the context in which a text was written, visualizing and considering counterfactuals (asking questions that challenge the assumptions or claims of the text, e.g., What might our country be like if the Civil War had not happened? How would Hamlet be different if Hamlet had simply killed the King?).
- **Multiple Perspectives:** Consideration of how text-based meanings might differ depending on point of view.
Parts: titles and headings, sense and intention of schemes and tropes (are "sense" and "intention" parts?), meaning of vocabulary from context; whole: structure of the text, important ideas and relationships among those ideas (some of these are parts--but some seem less tangible than I'd imagine a part to be).

- Relationship to text: The set of expectations and intentions a reader brings to a particular text or set of texts.
- Searches intentionally for relationships: An active and highly-aware quality of thinking closely related to inquiry and research.
- Takes texts apart: Discerns the level of importance or abstraction of textual elements and sees big and small pieces as parts of the whole meaning (compare to Analysis above).
- Ethos: *Ethos* (a term from classical rhetoric) is not used explicitly in the rubric. Nonetheless, in discussions of text (from the perspective of writer or reader), when *voice* is used (as it is in the “Reader’s Voice” criterion), the notions embodied by *ethos* are generally inferred, if not implied. The term is typically used to refer to the disposition of an individual, including point of view, values, and qualities of mind that are, in turn, grounded in the views, values, and predilections of a community. In the context of this rubric, it is the academic community at large, as well as particular disciplinary or professional communities to which we refer.
- Metacognition: Again, this is not a word that appears explicitly anywhere in the rubric, but it is implicit in a number of the descriptors, and is certainly a term that we find frequently in discussions of successful and rich learning. *Metacognition*, (a term typically attributed to the cognitive psychologist J.H. Flavell, 1976, 1979) applied to reading refers to the awareness, deliberateness, and reflexivity defining the activities and strategies that readers must control in order to work their ways effectively through different sorts of texts, from lab reports to sonnets, from math texts to historical narratives, or from grant applications to graphic novels, for example. And in this vein, *metacognition* refers here as well to an accomplished reader’s ability to consider the ethos reflected in any such text; to know that one is present and should be considered in any use of, or response to a text.

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Comprehension	Constructs meaning with the text, considering possible alternative meanings from multiple perspectives to ask critical questions	Uses the text, background knowledge, and knowledge of the author's context to draw inferences and make meaning	Draws conclusions and makes predictions regarding content and meaning	Apprehends vocabulary appropriately, using sentence, paragraph, and text structures to understand the author's message
Genres <i>Strategic Approaches to Texts</i>	Uses ability to identify texts within with in and across genres, monitoring and adjusting reading strategies and expectations based on generic nuances of particular texts	Articulates understandings about genre conventions and agreements central to a discipline or a cluster of related disciplines, using these understandings efficiently and effectively to comprehend, analyze, interpret, and integrate texts	Reflects on reading experiences across a variety of genres, reading both with and against the grain experimentally and intentionally	Applies tacit genre knowledge to a variety of classroom reading assignments in productive, if unreflective, ways
Relationship to text <i>Making meanings with texts in their contexts</i>	Evaluates texts for scholarly significance and relevance within and across the various disciplines, valuing them according to their contributions and consequences	Uses texts in the context of scholarship to develop a foundation of disciplinary knowledge and to raise and explore important questions	Engages texts in the context of guided projects with the intention and expectation of building topical and world knowledge	Approaches texts in the context of assignments with the intention and expectation of finding right answers and learning facts and concepts to display for credit
Analysis <i>Interacting with Texts in Parts and as Wholes</i>	Evaluates various kinds of analyses represented in academic texts for logic, purpose, and author's assumptions	Searches intentionally for relationships among the parts of a text and among whole texts to integrate knowledge in categories within and across disciplines	Takes texts apart, through reading and rereading, puts them back together for application in appropriate ways to serve negotiated academic intentions, e.g. guided projects	Comprehends the expectations of classroom reading assignments, using texts in parts and as wholes to fulfill these expectations
Interpretation <i>Making Sense with Texts as Blueprints for Meaning</i>	Views texts through a well-developed epistemological lens that leads to a productive and on-going dialogue with the scholarly literature	Applies, broadens, and refines a repertoire of interpretive strategies appropriate to the discipline, leading to integration and synthesis	Reflects on acts of textual problem-solving in terms of consequences for understanding, experimenting with a repertoire of interpretive strategies	Tries to solve text-based problems (e.g., looks for an intended message, fills gaps, resolves ambiguities, discerns and responds to irony, attends to historical meanings of words, clarifies multiple-meaning words) in reasonable, if unreflective, ways that produces plausible meanings
Reader's Voice <i>Participating in Academic Discourse about Texts</i>	Discusses texts with the independent intellectual and ethical disposition, character, and values necessary for membership in both the academic and public community	Elaborates in ways that reveal or question the underlying logic, accuracy, relevance, and/or importance of texts	Talks about texts in instructional conversations involving authors and other readers in multiple audiences	Comments about texts in ways that preserve the author's meanings and link them to the assignment