English Teachers are the C3POs of Disciplinary Discourse

How to Teach “Disciplinary Literacy Bridges”

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What did you do first?
How did you read it?
Where was your focus?
What did you NOT focus on?
How did you try to answer the questions?
Basic Literacy: Literacy skills such as decoding and knowledge of high-frequency words that underlie virtually all reading tasks.

Intermediate Literacy: Literacy skills common to many tasks, including generic comprehension strategies, common word meanings, and basic fluency.

Disciplinary Literacy: Literacy skills specialized to history, science, mathematics, literature, or other subject matter.

(Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008)
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(Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008)
How disciplinary readers read

Historians may use sourcing heuristics more than other disciplines.

Scientists may tend to focus on prediction of what comes next.

Literature scholars may interpret figurative language, symbols, irony, etc.

Mathematicians may focus on the precision of words, terms, symbols, and diagrams.

(Moje, 2007; Wineburg, 1991; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008)
The Increasing Specialization of Literacy Development

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(Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008)
A Student’s Literacy Experience

- Mathematics
- History
- Communication
- Arts
- Science
What is your disciplinary reader profile? Which disciplines are you most confident and accomplished in as a reader, and which are you least? Are there disciplines in which you do not feel that you are a particularly competent reader? Are there disciplines in which you would avoid reading if you could? Are there certain types of texts that you struggle with as a reader? Try your hand at creating your personal disciplinary literacy profile in Figure 1.7. Draw your “towers of literacy” that correspond to where you would place yourself as a reader in each of these disciplinary contexts.

**Figure 1.7. What Is Your Profile as a Disciplinary Reader?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highly Confident</th>
<th>Generally Competent</th>
<th>Can Get By</th>
<th>Sometimes Struggles</th>
<th>Often Struggles</th>
<th>Avoids at All Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literary Fiction</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Physical Science</td>
<td>Biological Science</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Buehl, D. (2011). *Developing readers in the academic disciplines.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association
How did you become literate in your discipline?

What teacher/book/experience drew you to your discipline?

What disciplinary concept/work did you find most difficult to master? What did you do?

What was an essential step in you becoming literate in your discipline?
Reading Stances

The Bottom Liner

The Researcher

The Feeler
The Bottom Liner

Primary Attributes

Seeks essential message of text

Barbara (On Notes from the Underground): “I didn’t know what I was reading. He just kept talking in circles and I couldn’t figure it out. It was unnecessary stuff that blocked me from the real point.”

Prefers more structured texts

Kacy (On The Communist Manifesto): “[I like it when the authors’ work] is black and white. “This is my point. This is why I believe in that point. This is my story, here’s my illustrations.”
Primary Attributes

Finds a number of texts boring, disengaging.

**Barbara** (on Philosophy): “It’s a bigger struggle for me. I don’t know why. But it’s either really boring, irrelevant, or hard to relate to. But with all of the philosophy, I used a lot of online sources so that I could dig to get better answers.”

May use online sources to seek simpler explanations.

**Sources mentioned:** SparkNotes, Wikipedia, Google Searches. 
*Emphasis on summaries of chapters and arguments.*
The Researcher

Primary Attributes

Significant research before, during, and after reading a text.

Jack: “We’re reading from texts that use different kinds of language--like, important words--we’ve never heard them before. But [after doing significant research] it doesn’t, like, throw you off. As opposed to seeing it all of a sudden, it feels more like local ground.”

Puts emphasis on context and authorial intent.

Christian: “I always assumed Marx wrote the manifesto in this manner because he was trying to get people to understand, so of course it would be written in common language. Notes was very new to me. I didn’t understand where he was coming from. I didn’t understand his point of view.”
The Feeler

Primary Attributes

Tries to connect with authors’ emotions

Katherine: “If I feel irritated or really, like, upset, I try to determine what was said that made them [the author] write in that kind of way. I try to, like, connect to the writers' emotions... I try to feel first, feel what they’re feeling, even if I don’t understand it.”

Tends to blame the author when faced with a difficult text.

Katherine: “I have been intimidated by the language. Especially the philosophy bits, when the authors seem to go on giant rants, all while using elevated languages. I mean, if you're writing this to change my mind, and I can't even understand what the hell you're saying, that just ticks me off. You’re not doing a good job, sir.”
The Feeler

**Primary Attributes**

**Tries to connect with authors’ emotions**

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**Tends to blame the author when faced with a difficult text.**

*Daniel*: “It pisses me off, honestly (when faced with difficult text)... there are so many parts [in *The Waste Land*] when I’m just like, ‘What in the world are you talking about, Dude?’”
Stances

The Bottom Liner

- Rereading
- Online Material
- Researches for simpler explanation
- Confused by alternative (e.g., nonlinear) structures
- Feels defeated with difficulty.

The Researcher

- Rereading
- Online Material
- Researches for context, author biographies
- Tries to prevent confusion by researching unfamiliar concepts

The Feeler

- Rereading
- Online Material
- Attempts to pull emotions from writing style
- Blames difficulty on author, not self.
What is your reader’s stance?

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Figure 1: Alternative stances on reading complex texts. This figure shows the specific and common strategies and qualities of three types of readers and the ways in which the stances can act as disciplinary literacy bridges.
The Bottom Liner Stance

Precision
Focus
Structure

Mathematics

Physics

Science
The Researcher Stance

Intertextual Reading

Context-Specific

History

Social Sciences
The Feeler Stance

Empathetic Reading

Focus on Aesthetics

Close Reading
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