

The background of the slide features a blurred image of several people, likely students, holding up white rectangular signs. Each sign has a large, dark grey question mark printed on it. The people are wearing light blue button-down shirts. The overall scene is out of focus, emphasizing the text in the foreground.

Helping Students Ask the Right Questions

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College Readiness

ACT College Readiness

40%

In 2024, only 40% of test-takers met the ACT's benchmark score of 22 for College Readiness in Reading (out of 36 possible points)

Average Score in 2023

20.1

Scores continue to decrease in recent years, possibly correlated with learning gaps due to COVID-19

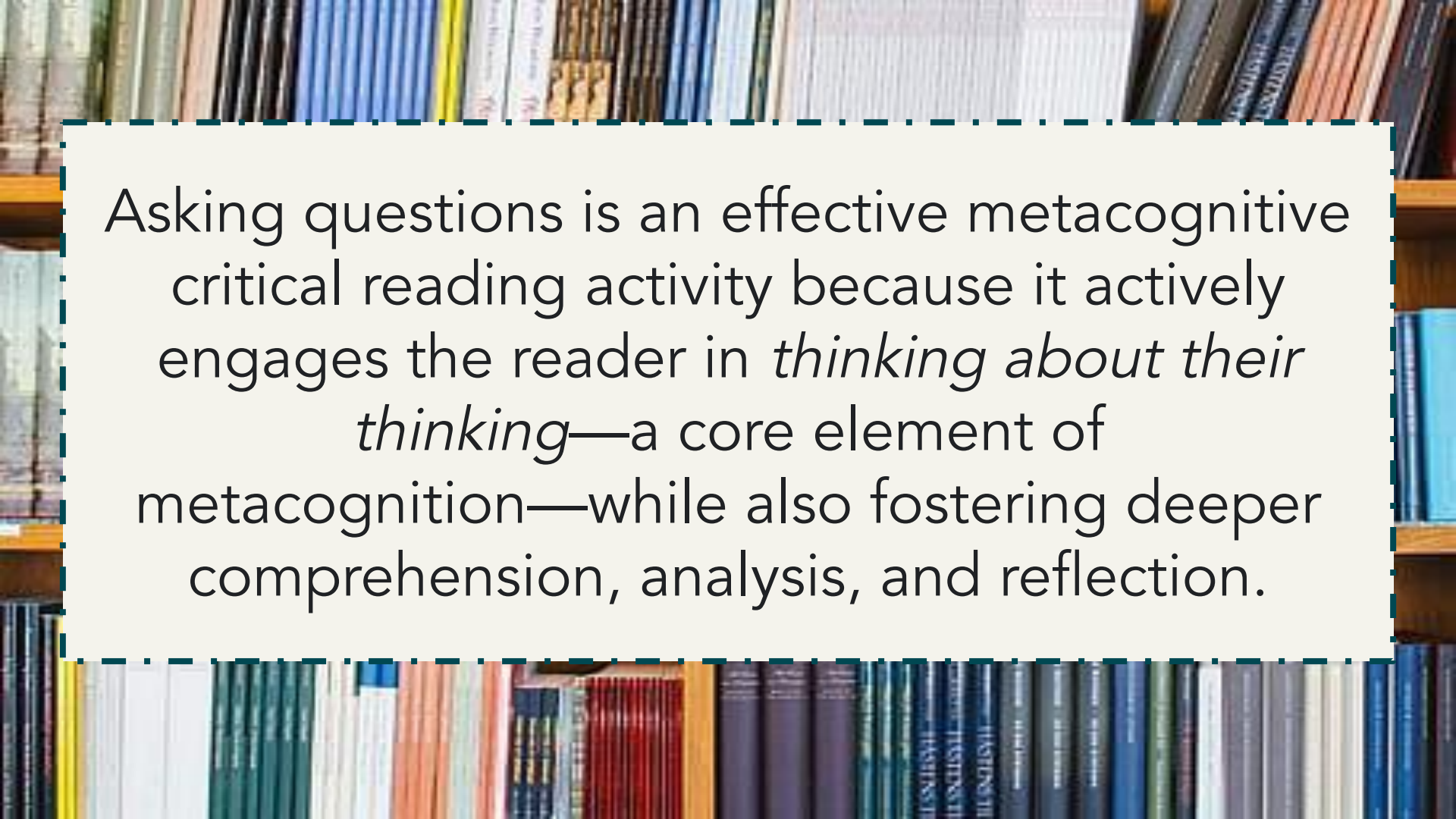
Average Score in 2022

20.4

Data Across Genders

20.6

Women taking the ACT scored an average of 20.6 while the men scored 19.6

The background of the image is a blurred photograph of a bookshelf. The shelves are filled with books of various colors, including blue, red, yellow, and white. The books are standing upright, and their spines are visible. The lighting is soft, and the overall tone is educational and scholarly.

Asking questions is an effective metacognitive critical reading activity because it actively engages the reader in *thinking about their thinking*—a core element of metacognition—while also fostering deeper comprehension, analysis, and reflection.



Research on Critical Reading & Question Asking

A 2014 meta-analysis on critical reading research found that emphasizing metacognitive self-monitoring and regulation (such as question asking) found more consistent results with a positive correlation to student reading comprehension (Lan, Lo & Hsu, 2014)

We should not assume that students already know how to read deeply and interact with texts in a way that encourages asking questions. It is a strategy that needs to be taught and reinforced (Harris, 1990)

The Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARS-I) asks: *"I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text."* Of the 585 English 095, English 101, English 101R students who took the test in Fall 2017, they averaged a *3.18 out of 5 on this question.*

We must be explicit in the ways we model disciplinary reading behaviors for students. That means, show students how to ask questions as a statistician, an anthropologist, or a market researcher (Braunger, 2011; Pugh & Honeyford, 2009; Shiorring, 2010)

How is asking questions metacognitive?

Promotes Active Reading

Instead of passively consuming the text, asking questions requires the reader to interact with it—probing ideas, seeking clarification, and anticipating meanings. This active engagement increases retention and comprehension.

Develops Process Awareness

When students ask questions like “Why is the author using this example?” or “What assumptions are being made?”, they evaluate their own understanding and reactions, building metacognitive awareness: they start noticing *how* they read and *what* they need to do when they don’t understand something.

Guides Purposeful Reading

Readers who ask questions are more likely to have a clear purpose for reading. They're looking for patterns, contradictions, evidence, or rhetorical moves—rather than just "getting through" the material.

Fosters Transferable Skills

The habit of questioning translates to better writing, stronger discussion contributions, and sharper analytical skills. It also helps learners recognize gaps in knowledge and seek out clarification or further resources.

What are the “right” questions?



Of course, there aren't really "right" questions. However, there are effective questions and questions that help students better understand the values of their discipline.

Purpose-Driven Questions

Encourage students to set a purpose or expectation for the reading:

- What do I already know about this topic?
- What do I expect to learn?
- Why was this text assigned? How does it connect to the course?
- What perspective or argument do I anticipate from the author?

This activates prior knowledge and primes critical engagement.

Audience and Rhetoric

To really understand the content of a text and to consider its utility, students should ask questions specifically about audience and purpose. These can include:

- For whom was the text written?
- Why was the text written?
- What biases might the author have based on his/her experiences?
- Why might the facts and ideas have been presented the way that they were, given the audience and purpose?
- Have ideas been left out to meet the needs of the audience and purpose?

Reflection & Synthesis

These questions help integrate and extend understanding:

- What surprised or challenged me?
- What questions do I still have?
- How does this reading connect to others we've done?
- How might I apply or challenge this text in my own work or thinking?

How can you make your questions visible?



Show Students Disciplinary Differences

Imagine students reading a short piece that explores ethics, society, power, and responsibility. You have asked students to read it once, then re-read through a disciplinary lens (alone or in groups), followed by a discussion or writing task that compares how different disciplines “read” the same text differently.

Philosophy: Is it ever morally justifiable to sacrifice one for the good of many?

Literary Studies: How does the story align with or subvert utopian/dystopian genre conventions?

Political Science: Who gets to decide what’s “acceptable suffering” in a society?

Sociology: How do group identity and collective happiness depend on marginalization?

Economics: What is the cost-benefit analysis of resource distribution in a functioning society?

Psychology: What role does empathy—or lack thereof—play in moral decision-making here?

Education: How could this text be used to teach ethical reasoning or civic responsibility?

STEM: What parallels exist between the story and the ethics of real-world technology deployment?

Share Your Questions

When discussing a text—whether from a textbook, a video, a novel, or a historical essay—use your own questions as an example of how to read like an expert in your field.

- 1) What questions would *you* ask when reading this text?
- 2) What questions would you expect *your students* to ask? Why?
- 3) How can they turn the questions they already asked into disciplinary questions?

Have Them Share Their Questions

As students learn how to ask questions in your course based on your models and examples, have them begin to share with each other as a Read-Think-Pair-Share. Students will

- 1) read the assigned text,
- 2) create disciplinary questions based on your models,
- 3) meet in pairs or small groups to analyze and improve everyone's examples, and
- 4) have each group ask their best question for discussion!

Reflection:

What kinds of questions
do you ask when you
read?

Key Takeaways

- 1) Encourage students to participate in reading by designing reading assignments that require asking (rather than only answering) texts.
- 2) Make asking questions a social activity. This can develop student confidence as readers and increase their disciplinary connections.
- 3) Show students how you ask questions of disciplinary texts as an expert reader.