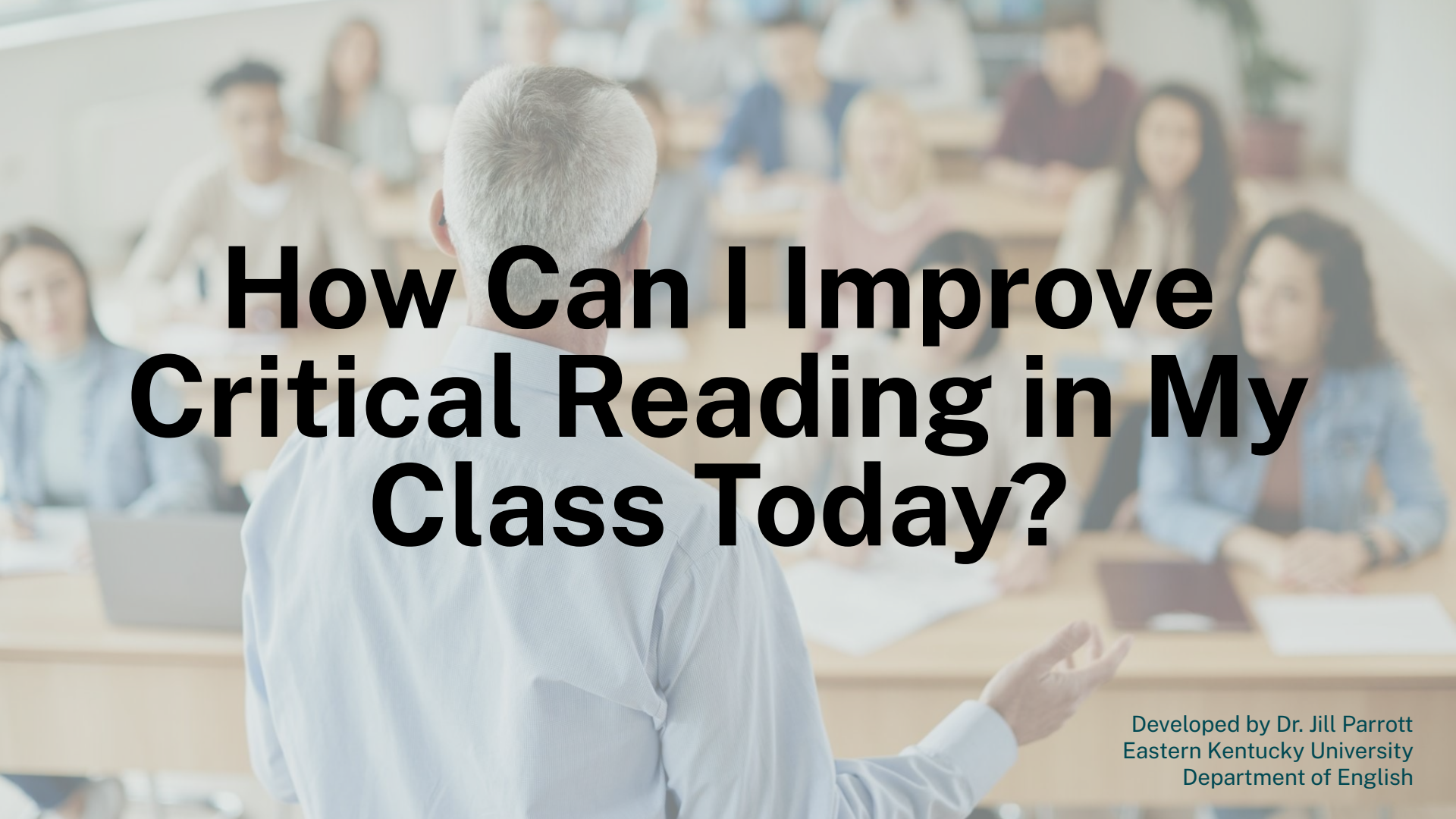




How Can I Improve Critical Reading in My Class Today?

Developed by Dr. Jill Parrott
Eastern Kentucky University
Department of English

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

Long-Term Improvements



Test Scores

Students who have better reading skills are more motivated to read and, therefore, have better reading comprehension, leading to improved test scores (McAlpine)



Application

Research shows that explicit critical reading instruction improves student understanding and facility with application of self-selected research texts (Parrott & Napier)



Academic Performance

Reading skills are strongly correlated with success across disciplines: using information to make decisions, communicating effectively, and thinking critically (ACRL)



Self-Perception

Students who are more confident readers also show signs of resilience when faced with other academic challenges (Hiebert & Daniel)

Assignments You Can Use Today



If you have 5 minutes . . .

Preview the reading for the next class meeting. Students better understand what they are reading when they understand **why** they are reading.

- At the end of class, take five minutes to draw the class's attention to what they'll be reading for the next class.
- Give them some context:
 - Who wrote it?
 - In what publication is it?
 - To what parts should they pay most attention?
 - What do you want them to do with it, or how will they be held accountable the next time you see them?

If you have 10 minutes . . .

Add **KWL-Q** to your preview. Students better prepare to read when they think about what they already know about a topic and formulate questions about what they want to learn.

- K:** After previewing a text assigned for homework, ask students what they already **Know** about the topic. How does the topic connect to their own experiences or to what they are learning in other classes?
- W:** Ask students what they **Want** to know from the assigned reading. Generate a list of questions that the assigned reading might answer.
- L:** Tell students that they will be asked to reflect on what they **Learned** from the reading at the beginning of the next class (and then be sure to follow through).
- Q:** Assign students to create a 2-3 **Questions** they still have about the reading to bring for the next class.

If you have 15 minutes . . .

Start the day with “I read this way.” Students better learn how to read critically in our disciplines when we show them what strategies we use when we read as experts. Choose a portion of a reading assignment for the day and walk your students through how you read the assignment:

- What words stood out to you as important or potentially confusing?
- How is the piece organized, and what is important about that to you or helps you better read the piece?
- When you read the piece, what did you annotate, underline, question, or comment? You can even show screenshots or handouts of a few pages so they see the work you’ve put into it.
- To what conclusions did you come that might help your students better understand how to put the different aspects of their reading together in a way that makes sense for your discipline?

If you have the whole class . . .

Help students develop metacognitive muscle. Students make better connections between critical reading and metacognition in their own lives when we make the invisible visible.

1. Choose an interesting, relevant, or required text for the day and work with them to help them build solid habits of mind for reading that require they read with purpose and reflect on their own reading processes.
2. Have everyone access the reading material for the day (textbook, article, website, etc.) and give a few minutes to review what they read to themselves. (5-10 minutes)
3. Draw their attention to a particular section of the reading or, if short, use it all. Set a timer for 2 minutes and have them write a summary of that section. For many students, this may be difficult, not because they haven't done the work but because they're not used to the habits required for critical reading. Ask them if it was easy or difficult to write the summary, and why? (10-20 minutes)

... whole class, cont. ...

4. Walk them through a series of critical reading strategies while they re-read that section, or assign a unique strategy to each small group. (20-30 minutes)

- a. Develop discussion questions
- b. Look up unfamiliar vocabulary
- c. Connect ideas to their other classes
- d. Connect ideas to their lives
- e. Outline the piece's organization
- f. Check understanding through graphic organizers

5. Finally, ask them to reflect on whether they now understand that section better than before: Is it clearer? Do they see its relationship to the larger piece better? What strategy, if any, was most effective, and why?

This can be done as a full group discussion, as a quiet low-stakes writing assignment turned in to you, or in pairs or small groups, depending on the size and dynamic of your individual class.

Reflection:

How well did the
strategy work for you?
Would you use it again?

Key Takeaways

- 1) Start small, but be consistent.
- 2) Metacognitive reading assignments help students in multiple ways, in and out of the classroom. Make them a priority rather than an afterthought.
- 3) Make the invisible visible by showing students how you read as an expert.

Works Cited

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