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Reviewed work:

Academic Reading (5th ed.). (2004). Kathleen T. McWhorter. Boston, MA: Pearson Longman. Pp. 540. ISBN 0321104242. \$68.00

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Academic Reading encompasses general learning and reading strategies and critical thinking skills, which are essential for college students to be successful in academics. The most notable feature of its content is a focus on adapting those skills and strategies to field-specific demands in six academic disciplines: social sciences, business, humanities and the arts, mathematics, natural sciences, and technical and applied fields.

The book is presented in four units: Fundamental Reading Strategies (Part 1, chapters 1–3), Critical Reading Strategies (Part 2, chapters 4–6), Academic Reading Strategies (Part 3, chapters 7–12), and Strategies for Specific Disciplines (Part 4, chapters 13–18). The sequence of the content is based on the author’s adoption of Bloom’s taxonomy of cognitive skills. This taxonomy classifies the required learning and reading skills and strategies for students from lower- to higher-level skills and from general learning and reading skills to more specific ones.

Within such a framework, the fundamental reading strategies at a lower level, outlined in the first part of the book, deal with the recognition and recall of specific facts such as identifying main ideas and supporting details and recognizing words using context clues and word parts. Moving from the basic reading skills to the more complex thinking level, the second part (critical reading strategies) includes evaluating the author’s message, techniques, and arguments. The third part is concerned with higher-level academic reading skills required in research and study as well as

general ones: recognizing patterns of academic thought, identifying textbook formats and features, reading graphics, searching and evaluating online sources, using writing as a vehicle of learning, and evaluating and synthesizing research materials. The final part provides students with opportunities to practice what they have learned from the previous parts of the text by applying the skills and strategies to their course work.

Among the many virtues of the book are a variety of features that aid students in learning more efficiently. Each chapter commences with a list of summarized learning objectives, explicitly addressing the goals to be achieved in the chapter. End-of-chapter summaries help students to review and refresh their memories about the content. The book also makes it possible for students to review what they learn throughout the text by pulling study tips together in an appendix showing factors of academic success at the end of the last chapter. Along with an end-of-book glossary, all these features enhance the effectiveness of the text by allowing students to conveniently access a summary of information that is scattered throughout the text.

The most prominent feature of the book is that it encourages students to familiarize themselves with the use of electronic sources by providing web activities and website links: “multimedia activities” introduces two online activities at the end of each chapter, and “multimedia applications” contains a list of useful curriculum-specific websites in the six disciplines at the end of each chapter in Part 4. These two kinds of follow-up activities guide students to apply the skills they learned in each chapter, which reinforces their learning and extends their knowledge through supplementary materials that are accessible electronically. In addition, they allow students to read authentic materials that are current and regularly updated on the Internet, making up for the limitations of materials in print form that soon become outdated.

Other valuable features of the book are the ample and varied reading selections and exercises, which make it an effective resource. It contains a wide variety of reading passages excerpted from authentic college textbooks and relevant academic sources. Note that in the 5th edition, a great deal of the original out-of-date materials have been replaced with materials published in the early 2000s. The lengths of the passages vary from one paragraph to several pages according to the purposes and type of activities. Within-chapter passages are tailored to lengths appropriate to the student’s purpose in practicing the reading and study skills presented in the chapter. Three- to five-page end-of-chapter reading selections, each accompanied by a vocabulary learning task, questions for both simple comprehension skills and higher-order critical thinking skills, and a task for applying strategies are suitable ways for students to integrate all of the reading and learning skills that they encounter in the chapter.

Exercises throughout the book comprise various types of activities, such as pair work and group work, which facilitate collaborative learning as well as individual work. Students can interact with each other as they apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the skills and strategies they learn in a chapter, while also individually accessing the reading and initiating their comprehension of the passages and problems. In addition, the exercises allow diverse ways of responding, from written to oral forms and from closed to open answers, encouraging students to interact with the author and text by predicting, questioning, and analyzing concepts and also with peers by discussing, comparing, and evaluating each others’ ideas.

As such, the book primarily takes an *interactive approach*, focusing on the interaction between readers as well as between the reader and the author or text. This approach serves as an underlying theoretical basis. Concurrently, the notion of *schema* is assumed to be crucial in reading and learning: students are encouraged to build their knowledge in their own course work step by step. For example, the text familiarizes students with the common academic patterns of thought prevalent in the six academic disciplines and directs them to the field-specific texts that illustrate these patterns. By laying out reading and learning skills consistently in sequence from the lower level to the higher level and repeating an identical chapter format, the organization of the textbook reinforces students' systematic learning and provides predictability. In addition, the book emphasizes the role of writing as a vehicle of reading and learning, devoting an entire chapter to the subject of using writing for reading and learning.

Despite all the positive values of the book, it has some limitations. First, although its target audience is college students, presumably freshmen, and its purpose is to improve their reading skills specifically in academic disciplines, the book does not necessarily have to include purely academically oriented reading selections throughout. Such a selection can cause difficulties in maintaining students' focus and decrease their motivation for and interest in reading. Also, in dealing with vocabulary and other fundamental skills in Part 2, the book focuses on the receptive level of vocabulary learning through reading. Given that the book views reading and writing as an interactive process, however, readers would expect it to delve into strategies to develop vocabulary in terms of depth as well as breadth at a productive level. In addition, except for the end-of-reading selections accompanied by a brief vocabulary review, the other parts of the book do not consider vocabulary learning. This gap could be filled by adding some relevant and meaningful activities for vocabulary learning throughout.

In addition to the lack of sufficient vocabulary learning skills and exercises, grammar is notably not dealt with in this book. Possibly, the author did not see a need to emphasize the role of syntactic structure in reading or the audience is expected to be native speakers of English, who have already reached a level of proficiency that requires no further grammar instruction. Finally, some skills could be rearranged to increase the efficiency of learning; for example, reading rate in chapter 2 could be combined with skimming and scanning in chapter 12.

McWhorter's *Academic Reading* explicitly presents skills and strategies of academia, not only for reading but also for general learning, that are in harmony with a wealth of reading selections and exercises and a variety of learning features and activities. Although its organization is in part controversial, on the whole, it serves as a useful guidebook for both native and advanced nonnative English-speaking college students who need to prepare for the challenge of university study and ultimate success in the academic world.

About the Reviewer

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