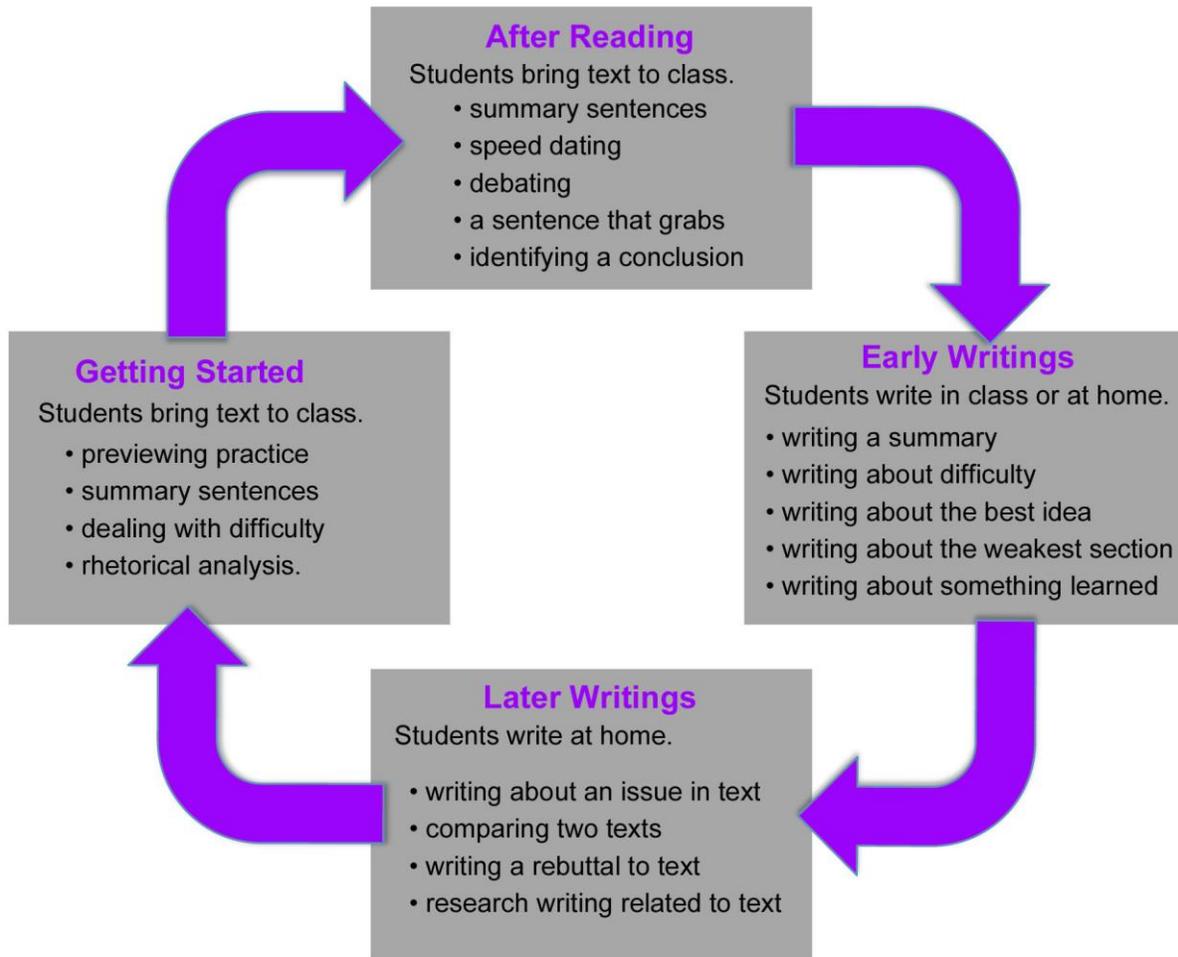


## The Reading-Writing Cycle



The diagram above represents a cycle of activities starting with the introduction of a reading to the class, moving through classroom discussion of the reading, then doing some fairly short writings in response to the reading, and ending with a full-length writing assignment.

The idea is that a class would cycle through these four activities a number of times during the semester—perhaps four or five—resulting in an engaged reading of four texts and extended writing in response to those texts.

Thanks to Katie Hern at Chabot College. This version of the cycle grew out of one that she has been using for years.

## Getting Started:

### Reasons for Reading.

Form students into groups and have each group generate a list of different reasons why they might read something. If they have difficulty getting started, you may want to give them some examples: reading for information, to answer a question, for pleasure. When the groups report out, compile a class list of these reasons. You may also want to discuss how a person's reading process might differ when reading for different purposes.

### Previewing Practice.

Form students into small groups and ask each group to study as many of the following as the text has: the front cover, the introduction, the flyleaves, the back cover, or the biography of the author. Have students Google the author and then answer some of the following questions:

- How difficult will this text be?
- How much time will I need to read it?
- What is the general subject area?
- What audience is the text intended for?
- Am I likely to agree or disagree with the text?
- What do I already know about the subject?

### Summary Sentence.

Form students into small groups and ask each group to read the same section of the text—a couple of paragraphs or so—and then to write a single sentence summarizing what the text says. Have the groups write their sentences on the board and discuss why they are not the same. Avoid trying to decide which sentence is “best” or the “correct answer.” Did the groups notice different details? Did they start with different assumptions? Were they moved by different parts of the selection? Did they misunderstand anything?

### Dealing with Difficulty.

Form students into small groups and ask each group to read a text and then to identify the most difficult passage in the selection. Or, you could have them read the text before coming to class. Discuss the reasons why the passage was difficult and the different strategies used to deal with the difficulty. Remind students that looking an unfamiliar word up in the dictionary is usually not the best strategy for dealing with difficulty.

### Rhetorical Analysis.

Form students into small groups and ask each group to read the same text—the opening paragraphs are usually enough. Then ask them to answer the following questions about the selection:

1. Whose is the voice speaking in the selection? What can you deduce about the speaker?
2. What assumptions does the author seem to make?
3. Who seems to be the intended audience for the selection?
4. What seems to be the purpose for the text? Why did the author write it?
5. What is the context, the situation in which the voice is speaking? Is the author joining an ongoing conversation?
6. What kind of writing is this? What genre?

## After Reading:

### Speed Dating

Before class, prepare a set of question cards. You need half as many cards as you have students in the class. The questions should be focused on a specific selection of text—perhaps as little as a sentence—within the reading

the student was to have done for class. Questions like the following seem to work best:

1. Explain what the author means by a difficult passage.
2. Agree or disagree with the author's assertion and give reasons.
3. What evidence does the author present for an assertion.
4. What evidence does the author ignore?
5. What does a passage say? Then, what does it do? (Examples of what a passage can "do": sum up a section, introduce a new idea, admit that some may disagree, give an example)

If possible, arrange the chairs or desks in the room into an inner and an outer circle, facing each other. Have students sit in the chairs and hand each pair of students a card. Each pair discusses their card for a few minutes; after which they leave the card behind and move to the right. Each student will then discuss a new card with a new partner.

Debating.

Divide the class into an even number of teams of four or five students each. Identify controversial issues in the assigned text, enough so you have half as many issues as there are teams. Assign a pro- and an anti- team to each issue. Give them time to prepare their arguments and then conduct debates in class. This activity takes some time—perhaps two class periods. The teams not involved in a particular debate can serve as judges for the debate.

A Sentence That Grabs.

Divide the class into teams of three or four. Ask each group to identify the sentence in the text assigned for that day that most strongly "grabs" their attention. Have each group write their sentence on the board and present their explanation of what it was about the sentence that "grabbed" them. When all groups have presented, discuss what characteristics occurred in most sentences.

Constructing a Meaning.

Ask students, working in groups, to examine a lengthy selection from the assigned reading. This works best if the selection makes a complex argument that will allow a variety of "readings." Ask each group to write a one-sentence statement of the main point of the selection and to identify the support the writer supplies for this conclusion.

Have each group write its statement on the board. Discuss why different groups reached different conclusions. Ask the groups to provide support for their conclusion. This exercise demonstrates convincingly the value of annotating a text.

## Early Writings:

Writing a Summary.

Ask students, working individually or in groups, to write a summary of an assigned reading. This could be done in class or at home. Select several summaries to compare in class.

Writing About Difficulty.

Working individually or in groups, ask students to identify a passage that caused them difficulty in an assigned reading. Ask them to write a short paper in which they explain why the passage was difficult and discuss what strategies they employed to overcome the difficulty.

Writing About the Best Idea.

Ask students, working individually or in groups, to identify the "best idea" in a reading assignment. Ask them to write a short paper that summarizes the idea, explains why it was selected as the "best" idea. If they are working in

groups, have each group write it's "best idea" on the board and discuss why the groups differed.

**Writing About the Weakest Point.** Ask students, working individually or in groups, to identify the "weakest" point in a reading assignment. Ask them to write a short paper that summarizes the idea, explains why it was selected as the weakest point. If they are working in groups, have each group write it's "weakest point" on the board and discuss why the groups differed.

**Writing About Something Learned.** Ask students, working in small groups, to make a list of things they learned from the reading assignment. Compile these lists and discuss the items that appeared on the lists of only one or two groups. Did the other groups not include these because they didn't understand them or because they already knew them (and so didn't "learn" them).

**Double-Entry Journals.** Ask students to keep a double-entry journal as they read. You can vary what you ask them to enter in each column for different assignments. For example, you might ask that in the left-hand column they simply summarize each paragraph of a text. Then in the right hand column, they can enter their reactions to what is in the left-hand column.

A different approach is to ask the to play Peter Elbow's "believing and doubting" game. In the left column, they attempt to put themselves in the shoes of the author and to express what he or she is saying. In the right column, they play devil's advocate; they adopt a skeptical or doubting attitude toward the text. They raise objections or counter-arguments.

Finally, a third approach to double-entry journals. On the left they record important ideas from a text; in the right column they explain how each idea relates to their own lives, experiences, or beliefs.

## Later Writings:

**Writing About an Issue in the Text.** Ask students to identify an issue raised by the text that they would like to write about. Ask them to find additional texts discussing the issue and then to write a full-length essay discussing this issue.

**Comparing Two Texts.** After students have read two texts taking different positions on an issue, ask them to write a full-length essay comparing the two texts.

**Writing a Rebuttal to a Text.** Ask students to write a full-length essay in which they disagree with a major point raised by an assigned reading.

**Research Writing Related to a Text.** Ask students to identify an issue raised by an assigned reading and to do thorough research into this issue, resulting in a full-length essay.