Reaching Reluctant Readers in a First-Year Writing Program
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Assignments, Activities, and Examples

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The Error Report Game

One way to encourage students to be careful and active readers is to award extra credit points whenever students identify any errors (spelling, grammar, punctuation, typos). Even though I only award 2 points (scale: 500+ =A) and cap it at 25 points, students eagerly scan through the syllabus, handouts, e-mails, announcements, articles, and even our texts searching for errors. Often I will plant errors in announcements or e-mails, but sometimes they discover unintentional ones. I even encourage them to look for errors beyond our classroom.

In order to earn the extra credit, the student e-mails me evidence of the error.
- If the student is correct, the points are earned.
- If the student is not, I explain why, and no points are awarded.
- If the "error" in question is a stylistic choice, I explain the the choices made by the writer and award the points.

If the student makes any errors in the e-mail, it provides me with a teaching opportunity to identify and explain the error. However, I don't subtract points when this occurs, as I don't want to discourage the student from playing the game and learning something new.

While it may take extra time to respond to student e-mails and award the points, those five minutes is time well spent, in my experience. Not all students elect to play the game, but those who do have fun with it. In addition, this is a great opportunity for the shy student to engage and shine in a safe zone. And it can build rapport between student and instructor.

Page#/ Paragraph#/ Line#	Notes based on text (What does it say?)	Response to text (What do I think?)

Reader name:
Title of work:

Page#/ Paragraph#/ Line#	Notes based on text (What does it say?)	Response to text (What do I think?)
105 Quote	Quote paraphrased: Putting the Gods first will bring success.	Although the quote is from a cavalry commander and refers to war, Pressfield applies it to the writer and her task of putting words to page. This supports his theme that the creation of art is a struggle.
106-7 Angels in the abstract	Pressfield prepares the reader for this section by warning the reader he will be using words such as "muses" and "angels" to represent psychic forces that contribute to the writing process. He gives the reader permission to replace angel and muse with terms with which the reader feels more comfortable. His "thesis" is that there are forces the reader can call allies.	For me, the process of writing/creating is mysterious and magical. So do I believe in muses? Why not? I have had too many situations that felt inspired by invisible forces. When I am embarking on a writing adventure I say that I am off to dance with my muses. To me, it's a more positive and playful way to approach the hard work at hand.
108-9 Approaching the mystery	Pressfield maintains that if a writer acts professionally and shows up to work responsibly and regularly, then the muses will be generous and provide ideas, insights, guidance.	Although it is my desire and goal to write every day, there are some days when I don't work on my project at hand. Yes, I'll have written for my classes or written in my journal during meditation, but not worked on my project. And yet, when I do sit down and roll up my sleeves, I know that during the 'review' of my material, I will begin to slide into that realm where ideas and insights flow to me.
110-112 Invoking the muse	Pressfield shares his experiences of writing, receiving sage advice from Paul, a fellow writer, the muses, and what success means to Pressfield.	I can relate to what Pressfield talks about regarding success. For me, I have felt successful at different times… and from the outside world it might not be such a big deal, such a big moment. For Pressfield it was typing two words: The End. For me, it's been having someone I respect respond to my work in such a way that I know they get it—they don't have to like it, but that they understand it means a lot to me: I have successfully transmitted my message.

Reader's Name: Desi Poteet
Title of Work: The War of Art "Book Three" by Steven Pressfield

Sharing Annotations

Everyone has a unique approach to reading and annotating text. This exercise encourages students to share their strategies with one another. This provides students with an opportunity to see how their peers annotate and encourages them to add new reading-annotation strategies to their literacy toolboxes.

1. Ask students to read and annotate a short, accessible, and engaging article for the next class.

2. In the next class, ask students to find a partner and exchange their annotations and discuss the strategies they deployed. (If students didn't do the assignment prior to class, they read and annotate during this time. They'll share their findings during the next day of class. Most students prefer to present when everyone else does, so this encourages students to show up prepared, even if they were absent the class before.)

3. Next, ask each pair to identify the strengths of each other's annotations to the class.

Even though this exercise can take time, it has many benefits. Students recognize there are many approaches to annotating—there is no "wrong way," only ways that work for each reader. In addition, they notice that they share similar styles of annotating with others, confirming that they aren't the only one who "uses different colored inks" or "asks the author crazy questions." They also practice presenting in front of a class with a partner.

Annotation Pass Around

This activity provides students with an opportunity to see how their instructor and peers annotate, and it encourages them to add new reading-annotation strategies to their literacy toolboxes.

1. Ask students to read and annotate a short, accessible, and engaging article for the next class. (Make sure you read and annotate the article, too.)

2. In the next class, if possible, form a circle and ask students to pass articles to the right. (The instructor should be in the circle and sharing her annotated article, too.)

3. Ask students to speed scan the document in front of them, then, in unison, pass to the right. Repeat this process until everyone has their own annotated article in front of them.

4. Ask students to share what they observed in the annotated articles. Encourage positive observations.

Even if a student has not completed this reading assignment, still have her participate as she will learn how others have chosen to annotate the article.

Resist the urge to provide a brief lesson on how to annotate prior to this assignment. This allows students to demonstrate their own methods and encourages diversity of learning strategies. It also gives them permission to experiment and find a method that works for them.

Student-Generated Quiz

This Student-Generated Quiz activity encourages active reading and class discussion.

Break students into groups of 4 to 6 students. Use a team leader to facilitate each group.

- Hand out index cards (4 x 6 work well), one to each student.
- Ask students to write down a question that demonstrates knowledge of an aspect of the material covered in the reading.
- Collect the cards.
- Redistribute the cards, making sure no one gets her/his own.
- Ask each student to read the question out loud and then provide the answer.
- Invite the author of the question to clarify or add to the answer.

Engaging in this activity gives students agency in their educational process.