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Traversing the intricacies of information sharing: Academic literacy as a toolbox for success

Exploring the world through literature is a great way to prepare for anything. Though the way we relay, use, or allow influence from these texts is based on some fundamental skills we’ve developed while younger. Some texts give morals through creative word choice and figurative language, which for me, are a bit difficult to uncover the meaning for. Informational literary techniques, on the other hand, also provide great information, plus they are easier for me to absorb. For instance, most mathematical textbooks contain very strictly worded definitions, extremely professional sentences that describe figures, and are written like reference material. Truthfully, all literary techniques, regardless of their comprehensive difficulty, have had a profound impact on how I interpret future texts and create my own. Experiences I’ve had in the past directly influence my ability to efficiently break down large texts, carefully construct the author’s true meaning, and read for precision, all of which help me carefully adapt for new literary encounters. Literacy is the main driver of decision making. Allowing these tools to assist me while interpreting texts can help me convey insider information strongly and influence others for the better. Techniques gathered from a broad scope also protect me from potentially unhealthy literacy such as slander, false solutions, and one-sided-stories.

About at the end of Highschool, I was enrolled in an AP Chemistry course which tasked the students to write weekly outlines from college level textbooks. This was excellent practice to improve my ability to efficiently break down large texts. For these weekly outlines I was expected to write several pages briefing the topic explained in a chapter. Due to the size of the textbook, I couldn’t simply write an abstract after what I read. I chose to use an outline approach to break down the text into manageable components during reading. This strategy contains 3 important sections: vocabulary, summary, interpretation. The vocabulary section is an ordered list of important words I find in the chapter and later reread and define. The summary section includes individual summaries of important topics read in the chapter. Lastly the interpretation section is meant to “reteach to an unfamiliar audience” the topic in my own words after reading. chemistry textbooks also follow a similar format where they systematically follow a specific order: preface, topic, equations, explanations, demonstrations, and applications. Due to the format of the chapters in our chemistry textbooks, it was very easy to employ the outline strategy and it greatly benefitted me as well. After writing these summaries I was better able to: recall facts and nuances from the text, understand oral lectures better, and heightened my ability to assist in group lab work. This strategy also improved my own lab reports, where I could employ the knowledge I’ve gained from my outline strategy to enrich my report’s detail. This experience has led me to fully enjoy a course as difficult as chemistry, especially allowing me to enjoy and absorb the large texts presented by the textbooks. It has also improved my writing in my notes during lectures as well as helped me develop a strategy I can extrapolate to other fields of study. I’ve successfully applied this strategy to courses such as calculus and physics which both have a similar structure in their respective textbooks. This strategy has also remained viable in college which requires more academically rigorous writing standards due to my major: Mechanical Engineering. This literary experience has given me the opportunity to produce a viable approach to large texts which I can extend to many different scenarios, especially while perusing a mechanical engineering career which involves a lot of research.

*A painting of two people

Description automatically generated* English classes commonly challenge their students by presenting an archaically written story that is unfamiliar to modern day students. For my class we were tasked with reading Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet. As a text that heavily relies on old figurative language, it was rather difficult to pinpoint the author’s meaning or purpose. Despite the difficulty of interpreting this text, the class as a helpful space to develop a strategy to tackle the text, has greatly improved my ability to carefully break down the author’s meaning. With the help of peers and the teacher I was able to find a reading strategy that greatly helped me interpret these texts. This strategy involves breaking down the text and identifying context evidence, then I can compare with outside sources to make an educated inference. A good example of outside sourcing is shown in Fig. 1. By employing a strategy that uses many different perspectives, I can better understand intervals of text which I can then use to build up an overall meaning. For instance, from Act 2 Scene 6 of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet: *“FRIAR LAWRENCE: So smile the heavens upon this holy act That after-hours with sorrow chide us not. ROMEO: Amen, amen. But come what sorrow can, It cannot countervail the exchange of joy That one short minute gives me in her sight. Do thou but close our hands with holy words, Then love-devouring death do what he dare, It is enough I may but call her mine. FRIAR LAWRENCE: These violent delights have violent ends And in their triumph die, like fire and powder, Which, as they kiss, consume. The sweetest honey Is loathsome in his own deliciousness And in the taste confounds the appetite. Therefore love moderately. Long love doth so. Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow.”*

Figure 1: An artist’s painting of Act 2 Scene 6 of Shakespeare’s play *“Romeo and Juliet”* where we see Romeo and Juliet talking to Lawrence about marriage as a unique interpretation of the scene.

This passage from the beginning of the act was hard to wrap my head around. Lines like *“That after-hours with sorrow chide us not.”* and *“Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow”* were notably hard toextract the meaning from. Using the strategy I developed in class, I can use lines in proximity such as *“Amen, amen. But come what sorrow can, It cannot countervail the exchange of joy.”* Giving insight that Romeo will not allow this sorrow to sway him, thus giving light to the meaning of the phrase, that sorrow will not overturn the love of marriage. Also getting input from peers in class can clear up the meaning. For instance, the teacher with more insight can give us clues to the meaning of *“Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow”* such as, foreshadowing and timing meaninglessness, which will prompt speculation amongst students. With the clever use of outside perspectives and in text evidence, I can bring meaning to phrases I’m personally struggling with. This skill has allowed me to be more engaged and enjoy the text which were normally quite challenging. It has led to an appreciation for this use of writing, as well as allowed me to appreciate the work writers do to make their writing more descriptively fun, including the demonstration of cleverly used language to deliver morals. Archaic writing has given me inspiration to diversify my own texts to give them a creative twist. It also has an extremely important effect on how I read news articles and read one sided text. The use of an open mind to build a global perspective can protect you and others from false solutions and one-sided stories because you are gathering lots of ideas and comparing them rationally. This skill has helped me become more adept around misinformation and become a writer who can write clear and concise papers, but also be able to express my ideas in a creative and fun way.

Programming has been an aspect for more than half of my life. I had a head start in my freshman intro to programming class where instead of learning new topics, I would document them accurately and be prepared to explain them to others. To accomplish this, I had to read lots of databases on programming and be able to document them in my own programs. This in turn has allowed me to practice reading texts for detail. These databases are written in a form not exactly the best for understanding but for detail. Without a lot of prior knowledge about keywords, it is easy to get lost. Through the extra flexibility in the class, I developed a strategy for using these texts. One part of the strategy is to read the documentation in full of no skipping or skimming. Due to the vast amounts of exclusive words that have special meanings it is important to catch all the detail you can within the documentation. The next part is to look words up, within the same documentation site you can read some more basic documentations. This also supports the next part of the strategy which is to not start out with the most complicated documentations. Everything in programming is cumulative where knowledge in a simpler field will help you understand more complex problems. The last part of my strategy was to pull all the pieces together to have a fluid and developed understanding of the functions, and then following an “Occam’s razor” approach, describe it to myself. Do I understand what I’m saying? If I could define the functionality in simple terms that means I’ve fully understood the documentation. I’ve employed this strategy both in my own code documentations and when speaking to students when they needed help. When documenting code, it is common to be explaining a certain section of the code to someone who has never seen it before, this is especially true in companies. In addition, when helping students, I got the chance to explain my understandings using fundamental concepts to describe something much more complicated. My practice in absorbing programming literacy and explaining it has allowed me to be a more valuable worker in the eyes of companies. Due to the collaborative nature of my mechanical engineering major, I’ve also had the chance to influence other student’s perspectives on difficult problems. Programming literacy has given me the information to better the outlook of other students through communication. Not only has reading programming documentation been a helpful factor in education, it has also helped me in internships when I have the ability to explain my work clearly. In an internship in Japan, I was frequently tasked with providing a presentation to a group of co-workers. With the ability to employ this reading strategy, to take reverence material write very clear explanations on PowerPoints, I was able to: keep my audience engaged, explain complex topics in a simple manner, provide a clear and effective rebuttal using complex reference materials, and make myself a credible employee in the company.

As it becomes easier and easier to post information online, compared to having physical publications, there is a greater need for literary agility and integrity when both reading and writing. Past literary experiences provide the tools necessary for me to achieve these qualities through skills in large texts, author meaning, and precision reading. Chemistry class has given me skills to absorb textbooks efficiently and enrich my writing. English class, despite the difficulty, has given me the ability to read while using context clues and regarding other’s perspectives to allow me to fully enjoy and understand challenging texts. Lastly my programming class has given me the space to improve my writing’s clarity and credibility as well as improve my ability to read reference materials for precision. All these skills can extrapolate to very important fields such as jobs, news, politics, mail, and so much more that all have a direct impact on the direction of life. These skills gained from a variety of literary experiences stick with me for the rest of my life and will continue to assist me as I progress through life. As the literacy of the world evolves it is important for me to adapt to the change by collecting literary skills and adding them to my toolbelt. There is gold amongst the sea of molten pyrite, the right tools will allow you to safely guide others straight to the true treasure.