Using Think-Alouds (TA)

The Think-Aloud is a routine that has the individual read aloud and express his or her thinking as the text is read. Think-Alouds model the thinking required behind the meaning making and the relationship that the reader has with the text.

Modeling Think-Alouds helps students and faculty realize collaboratively that:

- Reading is a complex process.
- Reading is hard work.
- Reading is problem solving.
- Reading skills are bound by the text and situation.

Think-Alouds demonstrate one’s thinking; by reading and thinking simultaneously, the reader makes his thinking visible by making it audible. The reader speaks his thoughts as they occur as the text is read and dissected for meaning.

Instructors model Think-Alouds in a strategic manner so that their reading and approach to making meaning helps students visualize, hear, and practice the mental activities used by good readers as they read text. Think-Alouds help de-mystify the process of reading for students. As a classroom routine, Think-Alouds help students focus on comprehension, learn about various approaches for discipline-specific texts, and explore ways of approaching and thinking about text. In other words, students learn that there are many effective ways to take on text—not just one as many readers believe.

A Think-Aloud is not an end to a means; instead, it is the beginning of a metacognitive conversation about content, reading process, and meaning-making. For example, Think-Alouds engage students because the course instructor, a discipline expert, models how his meaning-making unfolds as the Think-Aloud delineates the thinking that happens as the expert reads. This thinking is the internal processing. Then talking about what one is reading and one’s processes with others is the external aspect of a metacognitive conversation. Together, the internal and the external conversations are used to problem solve, make meaning, improve understanding, and support schema development.
Why Do Think-Alouds Work?

Like other Reading Apprenticeship® routines, the Think-Aloud routine promotes metacognitive conversation by guiding students in noticing their thinking, focusing on reading, taking charge of their reading, and becoming aware of subject area discourse.

The instructor models his reading of text a lot at the beginning of the quarter and then the students take their turns thinking aloud. This scaffolding task can be used to build and extend reading abilities to help students handle difficult reading passages. This becomes a shared activity. The students read and then “think out loud” about what they have read, ask questions and make comments about the passage. This helps make the “invisible” more “visible.” Inquiry is important as readers think aloud. Students will learn “fix-up” strategies from the discussion.

The TA is very effective for new texts, difficult passages, and new types of materials (i.e., health care or legal case studies, or technical schematics). Faculty and students spontaneously interrupt and respond to reading with questions and requests for clarification or metacognitive talk about their comprehension process.

For More Information

For more information and supporting materials about conducting Think-Alouds, visit the RTC Library’s LibGuide about Reading Apprenticeship® and RATs (Reading Apprenticeship Teachers and supporters) at http://libguides.rtc.edu/rats. At the LibGuide, click on the Reading Apprenticeship Routines drop down menu, and then on the Think-Aloud option. There you will find:

- Two videos of RTC’s Michele Lesmeister modeling how to do a Think-Aloud
- Two additional videos from YouTube of other instructors demonstrating Think-Alouds
- Links to websites with more info about conducting Think-Alouds
- A sampling of RTC Library materials about Think-Alouds including this book:


An 8-page study guide for Wilhelm’s book can be found on the Scholastic website. http://tinyurl.com/dzw12m

Also found on the Scholastic website are Wilhelm’s Guidelines and Student Handouts for Implementing Read-Aloud Strategies in Your Class. http://tinyurl.com/b7znuj