Teaching Strategies Showcase

Indiana University’s Teaching for Student Success

Module 4: Helping Students Learn How to Learn

Title: Four A’s

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# Context for this strategy

Students’ ability to move past mere comprehension of an assigned reading to thinking critically about the author’s messages is crucial. The Four A’s provides a basic framework for structuring students’ interactions with text. It is particularly fruitful as an assignment to complete while reading and in preparation for class discussions, especially in courses or with groups of students who need prompting and/or a more structured environment in order to have productive discussions.

# Materials needed to implement this strategy

* a sheet of paper divided across the middle both ways such that it creates four boxes; each box receives one of the following labels: agree, argue, assume, aspire
* readings which offer material that can be debated or perceived from multiple perspectives

# Step-by-step implementation

1. Each student is asked to complete the Four A’s note-taking by dividing a piece of paper into four boxes as described above. Responses to the assigned reading are then categorized using the labels agree, argue, assume, and aspire. The student is prompted to note what they agree with, would like to argue against, believe the author assumes, and finally what the reading makes them aspire to.
2. Students’ prepared notes can be leveraged in a number of discussion formats either face-to-face or virtually. For example, the instructor can facilitate discussion by addressing a specific A from the categorization. In other instances, the instructor might choose specific excerpts from the assigned reading and ask students how or where they categorized the material and why.

# Student response to this strategy

This strategy has been particularly useful with students earlier in their college careers who have been reticent to speak up in whole class discussions or who have struggled with the notion of reading critically. In several instances, students have reported to me that they continue to use this framework when reading and have put it to use as an organizing principle when writing argumentative or persuasive papers for other courses.

# Additional resources

This strategy is an adaptation of Four A’s Text Protocol from the School Reform Initiative. The original strategy can be found at: <https://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/4_a_text.pdf>