

Difficulty Paper Assignment Sheet Template

The Difficult Text

Identify the assigned text here, or explain how students should be selecting the text if they are choosing one for themselves.

Purpose

The purpose of the difficulty paper assignment is to help you pay greater attention to what your mind does as you read, and to allow you to explore texts in greater depth. In particular, I want you to learn about difficulty in reading—to recognize that in difficulty lies rich promise for interesting discoveries. All readers encounter difficulty, and we are exploring how to recognize it and use it to advance our understanding.

Draft Due Dates

I usually ask students to bring in draft sections of the difficulty paper as they complete them, so that they can discuss each section with their peers as they complete it.

Part 1: Identifying Difficulty

Read through the first text and notice any places that make you stop and think. Look for sections that particularly confuse or interest you.

Then, **write a 1-2 page detailed description of your experience**: what, *specifically*, did you focus on as you read? What, *specifically*, did you find interesting or confusing about these sections? What might you want to know more about? Be specific about which sections you are focusing on and what your mind was doing as you read these sections. Quote from the text as needed.

Part 2: Reading Strategy

1. Looking back at what you wrote in Part 1, clarify **one main question** about what it means to be a college student entering an academic discourse community. You will explore this question further using your “difficult” text.
2. **Formulate a plan of action (1-2 pages) in which you identify and explain the strategies you will use to explore your question using the text.**
3. Explain the steps each strategy involves, how these strategies relate to one another (if applicable), and also explain why you think your strategy will be effective.

Part 3: Implementing Your Plan

Here’s where you put your plan into action and answer your question. After re-reading the text—all the way through—using whatever strategy/strategies you have described in Part 2, write **2-3 pages** in which you reflect upon the text with a fresh perspective.

What new insights did you gain? In what ways did your understanding change or shift after re-reading the text? The focus here is on showing your new insights – you do not have to argue a particular position, and you do not have to have found an “answer” to your question; the primary goal here is to explore and to deepen your understanding.

Note: I sometimes ask students to use a minimum number of quotes in this section in order to “show” the reader where the new insight occurred.

Part 4: Evaluating Your Strategy

Reflect on your plan and the overall value or purpose of the assignment (1-2 pages): How effective were your strategies in helping you explore your question? What might you do differently next time? How can you apply these strategies to future encounters with challenging texts?

Feedback Checklist

Part 1

_____ 1-2 pages

_____ Is specific about which sections you are focusing on.

_____ Explains what your mind is doing as you read these sections; why you are interested/confused

Part 2

_____ 1-2 pages

_____ Clarifies one main question about the text to investigate

_____ The question is clear and focused

_____ The question will allow for a 2-3 page response

_____ Selects specific strategies

_____ Details each step of the plan in well-developed paragraphs

_____ Explains what you hope to accomplish by using each strategy

Part 3

_____ 2-3 pages

_____ Reflects how the writer has explored the question and gained insight

_____ Ideas organized in well-developed paragraphs

Part 4

_____ 1-2 pages

_____ Reflects on effectiveness of chosen strategies

_____ Reflects on future usefulness of those strategies as you continue to encounter difficult reading in college

_____ Reflects on value or purpose of the assignment

Evaluation Rubric

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Assignment Completion | Exhibits a pattern of not meeting assignment criteria. | Does not fully meet assignment criteria. | Adequately meets assignment criteria. | Successfully meets assignment criteria. |
| Paragraph development | Paragraphs are undeveloped. Connections between ideas are unclear. | Paragraphs inconsistently developed and/or organized. | Paragraphs are adequately developed; connections between ideas are clear. | Paragraphs are well-developed, organization is clear and logical. |
| Organization | Serious problems with organization and cohesion. | Organization is inconsistent and causes confusion. | Overall organization is adequate and presents no obstacles for the reader's understanding. | Organization is logical and shows clear awareness of the reader's needs and expectations. |
| Sentence craft | Exhibits poor sentence focus, overly simplistic sentences, serious problems at sentence level. | Writing is inconsistent at the sentence level; sentences may be overly simplistic or poorly organized. | Sentences may be clearly written but not sophisticated. No significant or frequent problems in focus, clarity, or development. | Sentences are syntactically varied, complex, and sophisticated in their development. |
| Source Use | Sources are not used, cited or are inaccurately cited. | Source use may be infrequent; citation may be inadequate. | The writer has used and cited sources adequately. | The writer has made excellent use of sources, correctly cited. |
| Proofreading | The number and type of errors make the text difficult to read. Four or more errors per page. | Errors are occasionally disruptive; fewer than 4 errors/page. | Errors are minimal and do not affect the overall clarity of the text. | The text is virtually free of errors. |