to develop rhetorical knowledge that will be useful for different purposes and audiences, writing teachers ask students to participate in a variety of rhetorical situations, whether working in groups with other students to discuss a reading, conferencing with a teacher over paper topic ideas, reading/responding to papers in a peer review workshop, or participating in the sharing of ideas in large-class discussions. In fact, to carry out the objectives of the writing course noted in the WPA Outcomes Statement, most classroom situations require active student participation, dialogue, and hands-on practice writing and communicating. Some of the rhetorical interactions—such as critical reading and conferencing—might take place outside the physical classroom, but they are nonetheless aspects of the scene of the writing course.

READING IN WRITING COURSES

Because first-year writing courses emphasize critical thinking, reading, and writing, they require that you do more than absorb and memorize material. In writing courses, teachers ask students to interact with readings as well as with classmates and the teacher. Academic readers inquire into the material, raise questions about it, and critically examine it—to stake out claims or positions and actively apply and construct knowledge, developing new frameworks of understanding.

One way to actively engage in learning is through active reading. The act of reading a text is not just an act of passively passing your eyes over the text but rather an active creation of the meaning of that text. You create meaning through the connections you make as a reader, and these connections depend on the expectations you bring to the texts as well as the questions you ask of it. Reading for your college writing course (and most other college courses) typically requires such a deliberate, engaged, and critical stance. As an academic reader, you are expected not only to appreciate what you are reading, but also to take a position in relation to it—to examine its argument, to become aware of its assumptions, to imagine counterarguments and evidence. In short, reading in your writing course means reading from the perspective of a writer, someone who is looking to engage the reading for ideas to apply or expand or even challenge in one’s own writing. As an active reader, you should imagine yourself in critical dialogue with the text you are reading. Box 5.2 highlights some strategies for critical reading.

Educator Paulo Freire clarifies this active, critical engagement in learning by comparing teaching and learning to banking. The “banking” concept of education envisions students as passive “receptacles” that teachers/bank clerks “deposit” information into; meanwhile students passively receive, file, and store the deposits. While the scenes of some of your college courses will

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Box 5.2 Strategies for Critical Reading

1. Previewing
   Before closely reading the text, begin by quickly familiarizing yourself with it, looking for clues about the scene and about where to start. Scan the text for its visual and visual features—the title, author, place and date of publication, and any headings, references, introductory notes, prefixes, abstracts, or graphics that might help you guess what type of text it is. Since particular genres encourage particular ways of reading, you can search genres for clues about the situation and tone for communicating with writers. The following questions will help you to look for signals about where to start with your reading:
   - What is the genre of the text I’m about to read? What are my expectations going into the text?
   - What is my purpose for reading? What reading strategies best fit my purpose?
   - What clues can I learn about the situation and scene from the title, the author, place of publication, date of publication, editorial notes, blurbs, abstracts, prefixes, or introductions?
   - Based on a quick scan of the textual features, what guesses can I make regarding the writer’s purpose and the role designated for the reader?
   - Do I have any previous knowledge of the subject, and how will this affect my reading?
   - How will my values, assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs influence my reading?

2. Annotating
   Annotating, the process of marking notes and comments in the margins of your text as you read, is a way of entering into an active conversation with the text you are reading. Annotation helps you to read more accurately, think critically about what you read, and retain what you read. You can talk back to the text, question points that are unclear and comment on areas of agreement and disagreement. Annotation includes marking a text, either by bracketing information, highlighting or underlining, and may include the following marginal annotations:
   - Comment on the passage ("This is confusing") or "I'm not convinced by this argument")
require their share of passively receiving information (through lectures) and filing and storing this information (through memorization), the scene of a writing course requires that you be challenged through what Freire describes as "problem posing" education. In a model of education as problem posing, teachers and students enter into dialogue with one another and with texts, with students cast in the role of "critical coinvestigators." As co-investigators, students are called upon to critically examine material and to explore connections between their own perspectives and the course content. Instead of passively receiving knowledge, students actively construct knowledge by locating meaning in their observations and interpretations and by being actively engaged in their own learning.

**DISCUSSION IN WRITING COURSES**

Rather than a traditional lecture class, you are probably finding that your writing class tends to be defined more as a workshop, with situations that call for interaction, whether through class discussion, group work exchanges, or in-class writing activities. A common situation in the writing class scene is class discussion, where students and teachers are constantly posing problems and asking questions, in addition to sharing diverse viewpoints necessary for critical reflection. You may find it beneficial to pay close attention during class discussions to the teacher's questions and discussion-leading devices, which can reveal his or her assumptions or expectations. How the teacher leads the class discussion and topics/questions that he or she raises may be particularly revealing about what issues the teacher finds important. In addition, listening to the varied perspectives of the class can give you critical insight into a topic or reading as you consider perspectives that you otherwise might not have considered.

**PEER REVIEW IN WRITING COURSES**

One of the most important rhetorical interactions in the writing classroom is between student writers who give feedback on each other's writing, often referred to as peer review or peer evaluation. Such peer review models the collaborative nature of college and university knowledge making that we discussed earlier. Students, working either in pairs or small groups, are able to get immediate feedback on their drafts in progress and to address a real audience as they discuss their drafts face-to-face with their readers. Because peer evaluation gives writers a chance to get feedback on their drafts from someone who does not have the power of a grade over them, this situation makes for a more open and productive exchange of opinion. As a peer reviewer, it is important to exercise your critical reading and thinking skills. While you should refrain from negatively criticizing your classmate's writing, you should be willing to critique it—to respond as an interested and engaged reader who has questions, suggestions, and useful feedback to give to the writer (see the sample peer review in the following section, "The Genres of Writing Courses").