

EAP Materials Piloting: Process, Choices, and Framework

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This paper outlines the procedures undertaken by a group of ELA teachers during the Spring 2015 Academic Term to identify more appropriate readings for the particular level (stream) of students they are teaching. It begins with a review of current literature supporting sound principles of materials evaluation, content-based instruction, and issues related to the vocabulary of texts. It then moves on to the rationale and proposal for changes made to ICU's ELA curriculum. The methodology and process undertaken is then explained in detail, as well as the reasons for selecting the readings chosen for Autumn Term piloting. The paper concludes with a brief explanation of future piloting plans for the Autumn and Winter Terms of 2015, as well as plans for reviewing the Spring Term 2016 readings during the 2015 Winter Term before providing suggestions for the future improvement of the ARW Stream 3 reading program and recommending the establishment of a regular materials evaluation system.

ICU's English for Liberal Arts Program (ELA) places great emphasis on assisting students in developing their critical thinking skills by engaging them in a series of academic reading and writing activities. This is implemented across the program's curriculum, but particularly in the two core courses Academic Reading and Writing (ARW) and Reading Content Analysis (RCA). This key idea is reinforced in a number of important readings the students study in their first term. In *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook With Exercises*, students learn that, "Throughout college and beyond, you will be expected to think, read, and write critically," and "In college work, much of your critical thinking will focus on written texts" (2012, p. 79). This idea is also the focus of the first ARW core reading, which emphasizes that college work requires active understanding, examination and evaluation of ideas and beliefs. A number of academic readings published in the in-house textbook are central to successful learning in both ARW and RCA. It is with this idea in mind, and after encouragement from the program director, that in Spring of 2015, the instructors teaching Stream Three students (hereafter ARW3), led by the Stream Coordinator, decided that the reading selections themselves required our own "critical examination and evaluation," and therefore a systematic and comprehensive review of all of the readings currently required of ARW3 students was initiated. Readings were analyzed using several lists of criteria, and these criteria will be presented and discussed in detail later.

Of course, this was not the first time for teachers to examine their own program critically. There have been both major and minor curriculum reviews and changes over the last few decades, however the most recent changes did not address the issue of the quality and quantity of ARW readings. There have occasionally been reading committees to review texts throughout the history of the ELA, but none that did so on any regular or systematic

basis. This kind of a committee has only been formed when it was deemed necessary. Of course, the ELA core readings have changed over the years; topics have changed, or have been rearranged within the academic calendar, and some of the readings have changed. For the most part, though, these changes have been the result of individual teachers or groups of teachers proposing occasional changes in readings.

Unlike these intermittent reading review activities of the past, some of the ARW3 teachers in Spring 2015 agreed to analyze all current readings, beginning with those readings required in the Autumn and Winter Terms, to determine if the ELA is providing the students with the best reading materials currently available. It should be noted that this is the first time in the history of curriculum that such a task has been undertaken in such a systematic and comprehensive manner.

The question, of course, is how to determine if a reading is better, or an improvement over a current reading. What follows is a detailed explanation of all the procedures undertaken during the Spring academic term to identify more appropriate readings; therefore, the results achieved are the main focus of this report. It begins with a review of current literature supporting sound principles of reading materials evaluation, content-based instruction, and issues related to the vocabulary level of texts. It then moves on to a rationale and proposal for change. The methodology and process undertaken is then explained, as well as the final selection for readings to pilot, and the reasons for selecting these readings. The paper concludes with a brief explanation of plans for piloting in the Autumn and Winter Term, plans for reviewing the Spring term readings during the Autumn and Winter Terms, and ends with suggestions for the future improvement of the ARW3 reading program as well as recommendations for the establishment of a consistent approach to curriculum review.

Literature Review

When embarking upon any curriculum development project, there are a number of elements that must be taken into consideration. If a program is starting from scratch, this includes determining goals and objectives, preferred approaches, priorities, etc. In the case where a curriculum already exists, but is being evaluated and modified, the method of renewal and criteria for evaluation must be added to the list of considerations. Incorporating all of these components is necessary because, “a good program should not be regarded as something that is static. It should always be sufficiently flexible to allow for modification in the light of how it actually works in the classroom and in response to changing needs and interests of the learners for whom it was prepared,” (Scario, 1988, p. 1). The goals of the ELA ARW3 curriculum development at ICU include an evaluation of the current materials, a review of the core principles of content-based instruction, and a re-assessment of vocabulary level and appropriateness in the current materials.

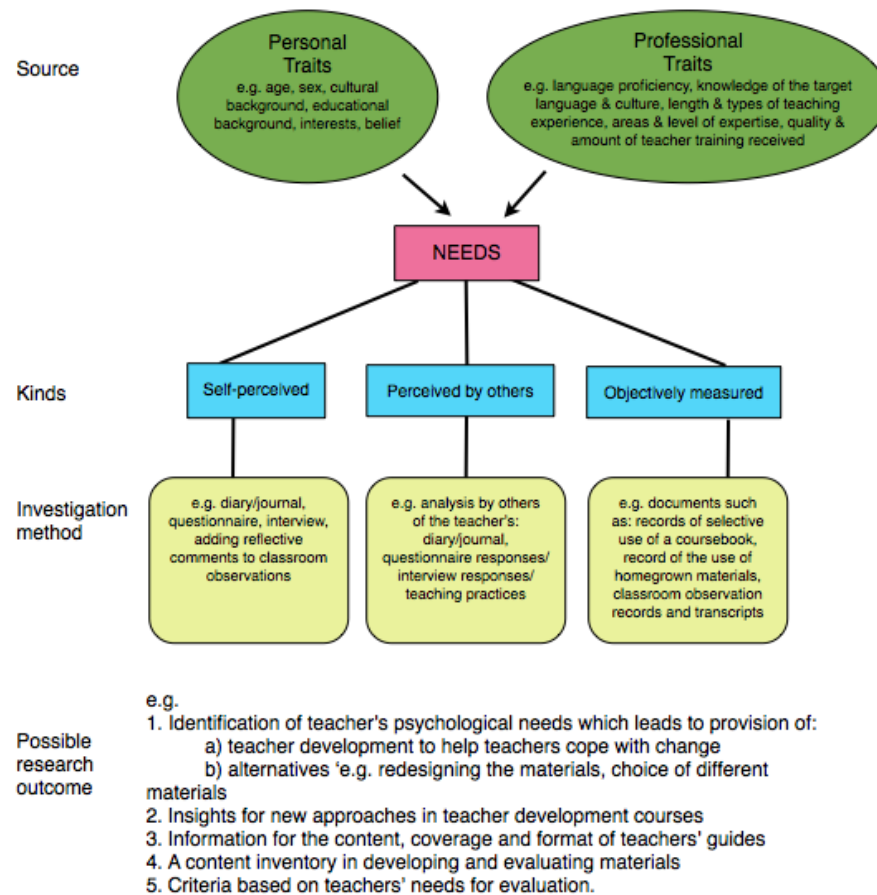
Materials Evaluation

Having received permission to pursue piloting of new materials for the ELA Reader, it became necessary to determine the best approach. This initial task is not so easy, as Tomlinson (2011) observes that a clear, somewhat uniform set of principles and procedures for second language materials evaluation, does not yet exist. While he presents some possible principles for use, Tomlinson also acknowledges that the problem of researchers being unable to agree on what elements are most relevant to language acquisition may be the reason for a

lack of principles in the first place. Some concepts that are frequently seen include the idea that learners need to be exposed to “rich, meaningful and comprehensible input,” (Tomlinson, 2011, pg. 7) and that materials “may have an impact beyond simply the learning of the language they present,” (Littlejohn, 2011, p. 180). In addition to the modification of the curriculum, this piloting project attempts to identify context-specific principles and establish a method to encourage more regular, consistent materials evaluation for the ELA Program. A combination of ideas from Tomlinson (2011), those of in-house records on past program development, and the program’s visions and values, were used as a framework here.

Ellis (2011) believes that quality evaluation ought to be composed of two components, macro- and micro-evaluation. A macro-evaluation is one which looks at the efficacy and efficiency of a curriculum in meeting its goals, with an eye to improvement. This includes perspectives from the administrative level and the curriculum level, the latter of which incorporates evaluation of materials with opinions of both teachers and learners. By bearing all of these in mind, an institution can confidently move forward in the pursuit of quality. Equally important, though less common, is the micro-evaluation which requires a narrow focus on a particular aspect of a program or curriculum. Examples of this include evaluating teacher practices, student participation levels, effectiveness of teaching a skill such as vocabulary strategies, or even a school’s academic calendar to determine the influence of that factor on student learning. By combining this approach to evaluation with Masuhara’s (2011) method of identifying teachers’ wants and needs (Figure 1) regarding the materials they use in their classrooms, these needs being those that are self-perceived, needs perceived by others, and objectively-measured needs, an institution can reasonably expect to produce an improved curriculum which has validity through achieving its goals, face validity with the parties involved, and, ideally, reliability in the process created which allows for its application to future materials evaluation projects.

Figure 1. Masuhara's (2011) Analysis of Teachers' Needs and Wants



Content-based Instruction

Content-based instruction (CBI) in EFL or second language learning contexts has expanded its reach over the last 40 years, beginning with concepts such as *theme-based* or *sheltered instruction* in the mid-1980s, which then developed into *content-based language instruction* during the early 1990s, and finally emerged in the 21st century from Europe under the banner of *content and language integrated learning* (CLIL) (Crandall & Kaufman, 2002a; Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). Even with the change in terminology over the years, such programs are often context-specific and thus no two CBI or CLIL programs are alike. The key to developing a curriculum is determining which style best fits institutional goals, which could be language-heavy, content-heavy, or both (Brinton & Jenson, 2002). When providing an overview of the diverse versions of CBI now seen, Crandall and Kaufman (2002b) highlighted a number of issues within CBI programs which are instructive when evaluating an existing curriculum and its place within a program such as the ELA: identifying or developing appropriate content, convincing faculty to participate, developing and maintaining communication and collaboration, and institutionalizing the effort (p. 2). All of these are challenges that exist within the ELA, prior to, during, and now following the most recent curriculum reform. Crandall and Kaufman argue that content faculty frequently feel that scaffolding should be avoided because “adapting the course for language learners will

necessarily result in a watering down of the content,” (p. 3) so attempts to include and engage content teachers in the process of curriculum development is key to success, especially when there is a clear distinction between the teacher teaching the content portion of the program and the teacher teaching the language component. Collaboration in development of CBI programs is also crucial because it creates partnerships and strengthens professional development within the institution. Stewart, Sagliano, and Sagliano (2002) describe one effective program in which language and content teachers met on a weekly basis to shore up connections between classes. The better the integration of both language and content by instructors, the more effective the program results, the worse the communication, the less positive the outcome (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010; Klee & Tedick, 1997). This can be applied to conversations between full-time ELA instructors on core course or between full-time and part-time ELA instructors regarding academic skills courses as well as between those in the ELA and in the College of Liberal Arts at ICU.

For a program such as at the ELA, both language and content are of equal importance. Stoller (2002) identifies characteristics of a successful CBI course, many of which overlap with the stated goals of the ELA. Stoller’s ideas include: promoting the integration of language, content, and strategy learning; viewing language as a medium for learning content and content as a resource for learning language; and using content materials to drive most instructional decisions (rather than language materials), endorsing purposeful language use, and encouraging student participation (p. 109). Maintaining these elements to ensure program quality must be a priority while conducting curriculum evaluation and development in this project.

Vocabulary Analysis of Texts

When evaluating existing materials or determining the viability of possible alternative texts in terms of appropriate vocabulary level, a principled approach is necessary. Nation’s (2007) four strands call for the integration of opportunities for meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. In particular, the strands emphasize the importance of exposing learners to comprehensible input to maximize their growth, with students ideally recognizing 98% of the running words in any given input (Nation, 2007). Krashen (2013) agrees with Nation that most comprehensible input for students is uninteresting and thus, both researchers suggest that level of input and degree of interest for the learner should be of equal value when evaluating or selecting materials.

It is rather common for second language educators to encourage deliberate vocabulary study, often with actual class time being dedicated to looking up or discussing words. However, increasingly, vocabulary research is showing that such direct study of vocabulary is relatively ineffective (Nation & Chung, 2009). If the emphasis is to be on exposure, then it makes sense to evaluate potential materials according to principles of effective vocabulary learning. Coxhead’s (2006) principles of learning (in the case of the ELA, academic) vocabulary are: frequency, repetition, spaced retrieval, avoiding interference, and generation. While all the principles are valuable, the initial three are best suited to the modification or measurement of difficulty level which applies to materials evaluation and selection. The principle of frequency requires that learning be on high-frequency words before less frequent ones. In the ELA, this translates to an emphasis on the Academic Word List (AWL) or English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Texts with a high frequency of academic words are

good candidates for inclusion in the in-house reader, however high frequency within a particular text, such as a topic-specific term like “bioethics” or a proper noun such as Japan, also makes a text a good candidate if the content is deemed worth teaching and the ELA has a “wide range of reading and listening materials so learners can encounter the target vocabulary in new contexts” (Coxhead, p. 23). The principle of repetition relates to frequency in that learners need sufficient, repeated exposure to words in order to gain fluency in their use. Spaced retrieval is also connected with frequency and repetition in that many occurrences of a word early on in the stages of learning it mean better likelihood of it being remembered. In fact, recurrence means “there is not enough time to forget. This is the ‘spaced’ part of the principle of ‘spaced retrieval’” (Coxhead, 2006, p. 20). If words across all ARW texts are high in frequency, with adequate repetition, and spaced out in the most effective manner to facilitate acquisition, then our students are situated in the best place for learning new, relevant words for their academic careers at the university.

Rationale

There were several reasons for pursuing the piloting of new materials in ARW3 which reflect both the ideas in the literature mentioned above and the needs of the students in the ELA program. Along with the feedback from the ARW teachers, which called for a need for change in some of the articles, another major factor for the decision to pilot was a general consensus that reading materials should reflect current issues. For instance, it was determined that there was the need for an update of the existing materials, content, and theories, some of which dated back to 1971, with an attempt to reflect the modern language and register of academic texts in the fields of social science covered in the Autumn Term. With regards to vocabulary, the update in materials was deemed necessary so as to have the curriculum reflect current beliefs on vocabulary instruction as well as accessibility and frequency of language as reflected in the ideas expressed in the reviewed literature. This incorporation of current language learning theory and practice also reflects the visions and values of the program. The final reason for pursuing piloting of updated materials in the Autumn Term was the need to reflect current beliefs on content-based instruction and content and language integrated learning, as explained above, which is also connected to the visions and values that each teacher in the ELA is asked to follow.

Methodology

Set in the ICU’s ELA program, this piloting study involved the 349 out of 575 new 2015 freshman university students placed in Stream Three, 214 female and 135 male. Placement of the students was determined with the TOEFL ITP, therefore the students involved in this study had an average TOEFL score of 516. The students were then divided into 18 sections with an average of 20 students per section. These sections were taught by 12 different teaching professionals, four female and eight male, from various countries and backgrounds, such as Canada, Great Britain, Japan, and, the United States. The piloting in this study was conducted for the purpose of modifying and contributing to material in the ARW3 course.

The process of this piloting study began in February and March 2015. All of the ELA teachers from Streams 1 to 4 were asked to complete a survey. The focus of this survey was to evaluate the existing articles in the in-house reader measured against the stated learning

objectives (LOs) and learning objective indicators (LOIs), and to offer a critical assessment of each article's strengths and weaknesses, while highlighting areas for improvement (Appendix 1).

The vocabulary in each reading was then analyzed using the Heatley, Nation and Coxhead's Vocabprofile (Cobb, 2002) to check for the amount of high frequency and academic vocabulary. Desired ranges of frequency for each article were: 70-75% K1000 words (the first one thousand most frequent words), approximately 5% K2000 words (the second one thousand most frequent words), approximately 10% from the AWL and fewer than 15% off-list. The results from both the survey and the vocabulary analysis were then shared with the teachers involved in the piloting.

In April 2015, the four Autumn social science topics of culture, perception, race, gender and the two Winter Term topics of bioethics and future issues, and their corresponding readings, were divided and assigned to the 12 teachers. Each teacher who participated in this project, either working in pairs or individually, was then asked to find possible replacement articles for their assigned topics that were preferably more up to date and of an equivalent or superior quality to the existing readings on the given topic. The teachers were asked to follow the LOs and LOIs, and a set of criteria, while making their choices. It should be emphasized that the ARW3 teachers did not try to find different readings merely for the sake of change, but rather for the sake of improvement.

Throughout the Spring Term, April to June 2015, the participating teachers met multiple times to discuss the content of the criteria used for evaluation, and later the content of their chosen articles. The suggested articles were distributed to the other teachers after a brief explanation about the rationale for their selection and inclusion in the piloting program. The teachers were then given time to read the chosen articles while using the agreed upon criteria for their evaluations.

Once the articles in question had been thoroughly examined by each of the participating teachers, meetings were held to discuss the merits and demerits of each article. Each article received a democratic vote for acceptance or rejection as a possible replacement of the article currently included in the in-house reader. All chosen articles were then prepared for insertion into the Autumn Term curriculum.

Materials Selection

One pilot paper was chosen for each of the three topics to be covered in the Autumn Term; perception, race, and gender. As well as being consistent with the values and learning outcomes specified for ARW3 in the staff handbook, an additional, more specific list of criteria was discussed and agreed upon:

- *Length.* The reading load for the Autumn Term is approximately 28,000 words, and it was decided that this level should be maintained.
- *Interest.* Content should be interesting and engaging for students.
- *Relevance.* Pertinent to the chosen topics (perception, race, gender).
- *Combination.* Compliments other articles in the reader well.
- *Difficulty.* Vocabulary, syntax and structure.
- *Testability.* The material lends itself to being tested on the course-wide test.
- *Little prerequisite knowledge.* Can be understood without prior knowledge of the subject at hand.
- *Model.* Provides students with a good model for writing.

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The first article chosen was a chapter from a book entitled *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication*, by Fred Jandt, a Professor of Communication at California State University, San Bernardino (retired). The chapter describes perceiving as a three-step process beginning with a selection stage, followed by organization, and finally, interpretation. At each step, there is a discussion of cultural influences supported with evidence and experiments, which can easily be adapted and used as engaging classroom activities, providing students with opportunities to draw from their personal experience. In addition, there are discussions of the effect of culture on sensing, the concept of face, and a comparison of high and low context societies.

The content was thought to be engaging for students, with many comparisons between Eastern and Western cultures providing opportunities for class debates and discussion activities. Although challenging, it is felt that the content can be easily understood without any prerequisite knowledge in the field. The concepts are clear, distinct, and organized into a coherent structure, providing a good model for structured academic writing and allowing comprehension to be easily tested.

In addition to the article itself, a discussion took place on how this article relates to others. The first article in the in-house textbook is a discussion of six stumbling blocks to intercultural communication, and the Jandt article is thought to be an excellent choice to follow, as it explains differences in perception in a cultural context, helping students further develop ideas about the reasons for cultural differences, and the challenges of intercultural communication.

A vocabulary analysis was carried out on this article using the principles described above. Articles were analyzed for the percentage of words that came from the K1000 score, the K2000 score, the AWL score, and off-list words (OFF score). Scores for this article were within our desired ranges. Percentages for this text were K1000: 74.42, K2000: 5.66, AWL: 9.74, OFF: 10.18.

The second article chosen, on the subject of race, is entitled, "How Real is Race?" co-authored by Mukhopadhyay and Heinze (2003), both anthropologists at San Jose State University. The article argues that race is a sociocultural construct rather than a series of distinct taxonomic groups. The paper discusses how some anthropologists reject fundamental theories of racial ideology, and proposes alternative terms such as "breeding population" to describe groups of people who have a high frequency of distinctive biological traits. Race, according to the article, is a concept constructed by cultures to categorize and identify people of a particular ancestral origin, sometimes, it is suggested, with negative consequences, such as creating societal divisions and legitimizing social inequality. This article challenges mainstream thinking on the subject of race, asking students to build on the critical thinking skills learned in the Spring Term and question some commonly widespread dogmas on the subject of race. A number of controversial questions are posed which can provide many possible topics for debate and discussion, as well as essay topics for the argumentative essay students are required to write in the Autumn Trimester.

Some teachers in the discussion group felt that the "How Real is Race?" article was more difficult than other articles in the reader. Concepts are more complex and more nuanced, with more technical vocabulary. A greater demand is placed on the student to comprehend, but also on the teacher's instruction. A concern not to oversimplify the in-house reader by replacing articles with easier ones was one of the piloting committee's concerns. In the case of this article, it is thought that academic standards would be improved by its inclusion. However, a concern was expressed that it may be too difficult for the student ability level.

Vocabulary analysis scores suggested that this article will be more challenging for students. The percentages of words from the academic word list, and the OFF list are higher for this article than for others in the reader, and the percentage of words from the most frequent 1000 word list is lower. Vocabulary analysis percentages were; K1000: 70.47, K2000: 4.35, AWL: 11.60, OFF: 13.58.

On the subject of race, the in-house reader also contains an article which provides a discussion of the work of renowned 18th-century biologist, Blumenbach, who created a highly influential racial classification system. A comparison between Blumenbach's taxonomy, and the discussion of how modern anthropologists refute fundamental theories of racial ideology provided by this article, gives students an opportunity to contrast vastly different viewpoints, and discuss how and why theories have evolved and changed over time.

The topics of perception and race have featured in the Autumn section of the in-house reader in previous years, but some teachers have informally added supplementary material on the topic of gender in order to broaden the syllabus. This year the committee decided to pilot an excerpt from the book *Gender* by Connell (2009), a sociologist specializing in gender from the University of Sydney. The book provides an introduction into gender studies and discusses how gender can be understood in the contemporary world with examples and references to empirical research. Connell highlights the multidimensional character of gender relations, discussing gender relationships within family relationships, big-business, politics, and culture.

Featuring examples from all over the world, the global character of this reading was thought to be one of its most appealing qualities. It was noted in a piloting meeting that students tend to respond with greater interest to examples from different countries. As well as being interesting, this article would help to encourage students to take an outward-looking, global perspective on contemporary issues such as gender, which seamlessly links the ELA journey of Autumn (inward-looking) to Winter (outward-looking).

Vocabulary analysis scores for this article suggest a slightly easier reading for students, with a lower percentage of academic words, and off list words, and a higher percentage of words from the most frequent 1000 word list. The vocabulary analysis percentages were; K1000: 76.37, K2000: 5.90, AWL: 8.86, OFF: 8.86.

Conclusion

The piloting described here is just beginning, so the results of using these three texts is still unknown. Furthermore, Autumn piloting is only the first step in a comprehensive re-evaluation of the ARW3 materials. Once feedback from students and teachers is collected on the Autumn texts, the teachers will decide what to recommend for inclusion in future in-house textbooks. In the meantime, the group will be reviewing Winter Term texts according to the same principles and criteria mentioned in this paper. Finally, an evaluation of Spring materials will be conducted in Winter 2015 in the hope of making recommendations for Spring 2016 piloting. This paper, as well as those to follow, documents the outcome of this process and lays important groundwork for developing a systematic approach to ELA materials review. It also contributes to ICU's institutional memory, so that instructors who follow later will know what has been done in the past.

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Appendix 1

ARW3 Course description, reading learning outcomes (LOs), and learning outcome indicators (LOIs) from the program handbook

Course Description: Along with RCA3, ARW3 is a core course in the ELA program. This course builds upon students' English proficiency at the intermediate level, in academic extensive reading and writing skills. Topics may include: educational values, argumentation, literature, intercultural issues, issues of race and gender, ethics, and visions of the future. Particular emphasis is placed on developing the ability to think critically, a cornerstone for further coursework in the liberal arts. The course is taught sequentially over three terms, each one building and refining upon the skills acquired in the previous term, thereby fostering students' autonomy and independence.

A. Reading Learning Outcomes (LOs): *Students will be able to...*

- employ a variety of reading strategies when encountering a new text which includes
 - previewing a text
 - marking/annotating
 - dealing with new vocabulary
- summarize the main idea or ideas of a reading
- identify the key elements or points in a reading
- demonstrate a critical attitude toward what they read by
 - identifying fallacies and flaws in reasoning
 - identifying an author's assumptions and biases
 - evaluating the quality of evidence presented in an argument
- show initiative and intellectual curiosity through searches for unfamiliar terms or concepts
- relate an author's ideas to their own cultural identity and place within a global community
- read a short work (or works) of fiction and identify the use of key literary terms and conventions
- participate in and lead small group discussions entirely in English

B. Reading Learning Outcome Indicators (LOIs)

- preview books and writing assignments.
- mark **essential** unfamiliar words and write definitions in their texts.
- interact with the authors of readings by asking questions, agreeing, and disagreeing through text annotations.
- show, compare, and evaluate the markings and annotations made in their texts.
- mark and make margin annotations of key elements/points of a reading and discuss these with others.
- verbally paraphrase points made within a text.
- verbally summarize a passage, passages, or an entire text.
- match fallacies learned with fallacies found within a reading.

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- discuss background, credibility, assumptions, and bias of an author.
- identify the types of evidence presented (example, fact, statistic, expert opinion, etc.).
- evaluate the quality of evidence presented using a set of provided criteria.
- actively participate in and lead small group discussions.
- participate in presentation and discussion activities.
- discuss how an author's ideas connect with or differ from their personal or cultural identity.
- discuss how key literary terms and conventions are employed by an author in a literary work.
- show comprehension of what they have read and skills they have learned through course-wide tests (e.g. through a short-answer exam, be able to summarize and react to key ideas in core readings).