and error. But we do our students a disservice if we let them flounder

> publicizing them as it said Congress had intended. The panel said that it is the responsibility of the agriculture secretary to carry out this intent. Not as a private banker, but as a public broker.[5]

Hirsch notes that a great deal of background knowledge is necessary to fully understand this text. "What is a federal appeals panel? Where is Missouri and what about Missouri is relevant to the issue? Why are many farmers debt ridden? What is the USDA? What is a public broker?"[6] John T. Bruer expands Hirsch's insight:

> We need background knowledge in reading for at least two reasons. First, background knowledge helps us make inferential links among the sentences that are written on the page. . . . Second, we need background information to construct and retain a text's gist. Given how our long-term memory works, to understand and remember what we read we have to relate the new information to schemas already in long-term memory. When background knowledge isn't active or available, we can remember very little of what we read.[7]

Given how unfamiliar most general studies and early major students are with background information that is idiosyncratic to philosophy and philosophy course culture, we should not be surprised that many students do not manage to develop a rich understanding of some of the texts we ask them to read. One symptom of this inadequate understanding is the ubiquitous question: "Will this be on the test?" Many students do not realize that (much of) their grade is determined by their ability to perform skills beyond regurgitating information.

The need for relevant background information has implications for teaching philosophy courses.[8] Professors should give students as much background information as possible regarding the idiosyncrasies of philosophy generally as well as the special idiosyncrasies of the particular course being taught. Certainly no professor can give all of her students all of the relevant background knowledge needed to move beyond novice performance. However, no professor is completely powerless and each professor fails her students if she does not give what she can. The "How to Read Philosophy" handout in the appendix represents one manifestation of this background information.

Further, professors should help students gather more background information by requiring the mastery of relevant basic philosophical content, such as the definition of a sound argument. Exams should have a comprehensive short answer section to encourage this mastery. Simple mastery of information is an interactive prerequisite for the creation of rich understanding. Exams should also have essay sections because students actually create rich understanding in essays. However, explicit instruction regarding how to integrate knowledge effectively in an essay must also be offered. Without such essay writing instruction students are likely to (typically falsely) assume that essays are simply the location of comprehensive regurgitation of facts. Unless students

are shown how to build reflective arguments from the information they have mastered they are likely to produce essays that seem to parrot the material. Purely "objective" exams are problematic because they do not give students the opportunity to create rich understanding. Exam essays are problematic when they are not accompanied by a requirement that facts be mastered. Dual format exams should encourage learning more fully than single format exams because dual format exams demand the mastery of information and encourage students to create their own rich understanding of the material.

The "How To" In "How to Read Philosophy"

The "How to Read Philosophy" handout (see appendix) begins with a description of some of the background information that instructors are apt to assume their students have. Good reading behaviors and unique features of philosophy texts are described. Also described are the differences between reading for enlightenment and reading for information, the differences between problem-based, historical, and figure-based philosophy classes, and the differences between primary and secondary sources. Next, three facets of the process of successful reading are delineated: stage setting, understanding, and evaluation.[9] The stage setting facet requires students to read the entire article quickly. The understanding facet requires students to re-read the entire article very carefully. During the stage setting read each student develops his or her own background information regarding the text. This particularized background information facilitates understanding during the careful re-read. Further, instructions regarding how to take notes while reading are provided, as are examples of note taking and key phrases. The dialogical nature of philosophical texts is also discussed. Finally, some frequently asked questions about reading philosophical texts are answered.

Of course, creating and distributing a handout alone does not typically solve learning problems. A number of scaffolding activities occur before and after students read the handout. First, students read, summarize, and evaluate a short passage in class. Second, students describe what they did while they read, summarized, and evaluated. Each student saves this pre-instructional self-reflection for comparison to post-instructional self-reflection. Third, students read the "How to Read Philosophy" handout. Fourth, students read, flag, summarize, and evaluate the passage again. Fifth, they compare their pre-instructional and post-instructional work to identify what they have learned. This second comparative self-assessment is turned in.[10] Sixth, to make further aspects of the learning process explicit, students examine the comparative post-instructional self-assessment of some of their class-

mates. Seventh, students turn in a formal summary of a complex text. In this summary students are expected to pull together whar3

ideas into one intellectually manageable package of related but dissimilar ideas. Novices may not notice the conceptual linkages. Novices may attempt to memorize the meanings of these terms in isolation by rote. Such novices may be able to accurately identify these definitions on a multiple-choice exam. However, they are likely to have difficulty writing a sophisticated essay because they have not discerned the similarities and dissimilarities needed for rich understanding. To help students perform better, professors should do their best to explicitly describe how they chunk information.

Bruer also notes that among "the basic metacognitive skills are the ability to predict results of one's own problem-solving actions, to check the results of one's own actions (Did it work?), to monitor one's progress toward a solution (How am I doing?), and to test how reasonable one's actions and solutions are against the larger reality (Does this make sense?)."[14] Some novices have more metacognitive skill than others. Students differ in their ability to monitor and control their own learning progress. The metacognitive skills of juniors and seniors tend to be much more sharply honed than are those of first and second year students.

Importantly, students with better metacognitive skills learn new information more easily, accurately, and completely than students with weaker metacognitive skills. Good metacognition is a principle asset in learning.[15] If we want students to learn as much as possible, then we should help them improve their metacognitive skills.

Metacognition is involved in how I teach novices to read philosophy more successfully. Students have self-assessment questions to answer while reading. They must explicitly compare their self-reflection with the self-reflection of others. And, they must turn in written assignments to demonstrate their success.

There are other less obvious ways to encourage metacognition. For example, early in the semester students are required to pass notes to each other in class. At the end of class, each student must have contributed at least one question or answer to a written dialogue that took place in note passing during class. To receive credit, students must be on the lookout for material that they do not sufficiently understand and write a question or answer regarding it. In other words, students are given credit for being metacognitive during class.

One may worry that note passing is a dangerous practice because it provides cover to those who want to write off-topic notes and it distracts students from lecture. These worries seem unfounded. First, most students are quite good at multi-tasking. Students can write notes and pay attention to lecture at the same time. Second, the benefits outweigh the burdens: an improved ability to formulate a good question and a greater awareness of when one needs to ask a question. If

the notes are turned in, instructors may receive the further benefit of valuable feedback regarding what is unclear to quiet students. Also, some students use the opportunity to have passionate debates with classmates. One day when the topic of the lecture was secular meta-ethics two students independently discovered the "Euthyphro" question about piety, moved to a discussion of God's attributes in an attempt to resolve it and finally discussed the problem of evil. Their thinking was not as rigorous as it should be by the end of the semester. Nevertheless, for two students to spontaneously generate an in-depth, on-task conversation in their second week of college is no small achievement.

should learn to take a well-justified stand that you are able to defend. When you read philosophy you should look for arguments, reasons, and conclusions, not facts, plot or character development, to help you reach your goal of evaluating the plausibility of various positions a person might take on some issue.

Basic Good Reading Behaviors[16]

- Take care of yourself (take breaks, sit where you won't be distracted, give yourself enough time to read well, sit in an uncomfortable chair to avoid dozing off, etc.)
- Interact with the material (talk to your friends and classmates about what you have read, use a dictionary and philosophical encyclopedia while reading, remember you are reading one person's contribution to an ongoing debate, disagree with the author)
- Keep reasonable expectations (you may not understand everything without some effort, you may need to ask for help or clarification).
- Be able to state the author's conclusion and the gist of the argument for that conclusion BEFORE you come to class.
- Evaluate the gist of the author's argument BEFORE class.
- FLAG and TAKE NOTES. (Flagging is explained below)

Important Background Information

Reading for Information versus Reading for Enlightenment

You are familiar with reading for information: You pass your eyes over some words until some information about the world sticks in your head.

So, you are in a problem-based course where you are supposed to read primary sources for enlightenment. But how, exactly, does one read for enlightenment? Well, strong philosophy readers, people who read with care, do three things. As people increase their ability to read philosophy well they gradually become unaware that they do facet one and they combine facets two and three. However, it is a good idea for non-experts to do one thing at a time.

Warning: You may not be able to do this until you reach the end of the article. Mark anything that seems like it might be a thesis statement or conclusion when you first notice it, then pick the one that seems most central when you are done. In some cases, the author may not even actually write a thesis statement down, so you may need to write one for the author.

- Look up definitions of words you don't know and write them in the margins.
  Warning: Don't get bogged down while doing this. If it is too difficult to figure out which meaning of a term an author seems to have in mind, or if you have to read an entire encyclopedia entry to figure out the meaning, just move on. (If you read near a computer see On-line Dictionary: http://dictionary.reference.com/ and Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/.)
- FLAG the structure of the article in as much detail as possible without getting bogged down. When you flag a text you put marks in it that will allow you to reconstruct the meaning of the text without having to re-read the entire text again. See below for specific suggestions on how to flag an article
- Don't let anything stop your progress. This is a fast read. You may skim long examples.

While doing the fast-read, ask yourself "How am I doing?" by answering the following questions:

Have I identified the thesis statement and written it down?

Do I know what the conclusion of the author's argument is and have I marked places in the text where important steps toward that conclusion occur?

Facet Two—Understanding

Develop a sophisticated understanding of the text. You should be able to explain to a friend how the author defends her/his conclusion. Once you are able to coherently explain the article in your own words, you have truly internalized it—good job. When reading for understanding, remember to do the following:

- Re-read the entire article VERY CAREFULLY.
- Correct and add to your previous flagging.
- Take lots of notes. In these notes, rephrase what the author says in your own words.
  Remember: You should practice the principle of charity when taking notes. Describe the author's view in the most favorable way possible. If you have trouble taking notes, stop at the end of every section or paragraph (sometimes even every sentence) and mentally rephrase the meaning of the text in your own words.
- Draw diagrams or flow charts of the major moves in the article if doing so helps you.

Have I figured out, exactly, which of my beliefs I must change in light of what I have learned from the author?
Have I looked for some point that the author did not consider that might influence what I think is true?

Two Important Details

(1) Flagging

When you flag a text you put short notes, preferably in pencil, in the margins of the text (unless you are using a library book) that will remind you of many details in the text so that you will not have to re-read an entire text to reconstruct its meaning in your head. Flagging marks allow you to pick out various important features of the text for further study.

Flagging is better than highlighting because flagging is more detailed than highlighting. If all you're interested in doing is distinguishing something that seems important from other stuff that doesn't seem important then highlighting is fine. But you want to do more than just distinguish important from unimportant. There is more than one kind of important thing in a philosophy text, and you want to mark your text in such a way that you can tell the difference. Another good thing about flagging is that you can "unflag" and you can't "unhighlight." The flexibility to change your notes is important because sometimes as you read further into a text, or read it a second time, you realize that something that seemed important really isn't important.

There are many ways to flag a text. You should develop your own method and notations. You should use whatever marks help you attain the goal of noting the different types of important parts of a text. A part of the text is important when it must be present for the author's conclusion to make sense. On some occasions important things are a sentence or a clause in length, but other times important things are a paragraph or a page long. The following are suggestions of abbreviations that have been particularly usefuseb,2Dg0.0ag at,taneltaneeefus5(A
"15(y words5(xe.g., Firs0.0t a se, [i], [ii]boohod Ifroonsl)20oulf)s f
3

A Final Complication

Linear versus Dialogical Writing

Students sometimes ask me one or all of the following questions: (1) Why does the author contradict herself? (2) Why does the author repeat himself so much? (3) Why is this reading so wordy? Students ask these questions, I think, because they expect the reading to be linear when, in fact, philosophical writing is usually dialogical. So, let me tell you a little bit about dialogical writing and then I will answer each question individually.

Linear writing moves in a straightforward way from one idea to the next, without examining (m)any supporting or contradictory ideas. Dialogical writing explicitly acknowledges and responds to criticism. It may be helpful to think of philosophical writing as a monologue that contains a dialogue.[18] The author is speaking directly to you, delivering a monologue for your consideration. But in the monologue, the author is telling you about a dialogue or debate that she or he knows about, while giving you reasons for thinking that her or his understanding of that debate is right. As you know, in some debates there are more than two sides and sometimes people on the same side have different reasons for believing what they believe. Authors will take the time to tell you about as many sides, or different camps within one side, as they think you need to know about to understand, and be persuaded by, their view. This confuses people sometimes because it is hard to keep track of whether the author is arguing for their side or talking from another point of view or camp within the same side for the sake of (good) argument.

Points to remember about dialogical philosophical texts

- Authors sometimes support their views with thought-experiments (i.e., examples that ask you to imagine how things would be if something that is not true, were true).
- Authors sometimes argue that other thinkers haven't noticed an important difference between two things. Authors draw distinctions.
- Authors sometimes argue that another philosopher's views or arguments ought to be rejected.

  There is something really tricky here. Fair-minded writers will practice the principle of charity. According to the principle of charity, one should give one's opponents the benefit of the doubt; one should respond to the best thing that someone who disagrees with you could say, even if they didn't notice it. Sometimes attempts to abide by the principle of charity results in authors presenting arguments for the correctness of views they ultimately reject. That is, for the sake of (good) argument some authors will present reasons for thinking that their critics are right. Try to avoid mistaking charitable elucidation for the author's main argument.

Now that you are more familiar with dialogical texts I can answer the questions students sometimes ask about them.

Frequently Asked Questions

(1) Why does the author contradict herself?
Sometimes thinkers do unwittingly contradict themselves. Most of the time, however, people perceive a contradiction where there isn't one because they fail to notice a c

hardest to understand, and don't assume the worst about the author, even if the author doesn't always behave as you would like.

Third, and most importantly, not every complex idea can be stated in simple terms. Sometimes simplification is over-simplification, where the important nuances of what a person really thinks are lost. It is true that some philosophical writing is more complicated than it needs to be, but not all of it is. Some philosophical writing needs to be complicated to express a complicated idea. Part of the beauty of philosophy is its

this one)," www.cariboo.bc.ca/ae/php/phil/mclaughl/courses/howread.htm; and Letitia Meynell, "Reading Philosophy Actively," http://myweb.dal.ca/lt531391/readphil.pdf.

10. If time for grading is scarce, an instructor need only read a small number of the comparative self-assessments in detail and "grade" on a pass or fail basis. There are two reasons why it is important to initially give students credit for this work. First, the abruptness of the change in teaching and learning styles from high school to higher education is reduced. This reduction in abruptness eases student anxiety and builds student confidence. Second, giving credit for this work takes advantage of the assumption made by some students that uncredited work is unimportant. To transfer responsibility for success firmly to the student, credit should not be given for such assignments as the semester progresses. For more on strategies for easing the transition from high school to higher education, see Ruth Beard and James Hartley, *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (4th ed.) (London: Harper and Row, 1984), chap. 5: "Adjusting To Higher Education."

11. Bruer, *Schools for Thought*, 67.

12. Ibid., 77–78.

13. Ibid., 59ff.

14. Ibid., 72.

15. John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown, and Rodney R. Cocking, eds., *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (expanded ed.) (Washington: National Academy Press, 2000); A. L. Brown "Domain-Specific Principles Affect Learning and Transfer in Children," *Cognitive Science* 14 (1990): 107–33; J. H. Flavell and H. M. Wellman, "Metamemory," in *Perspectives on the Development of Memory and Cognition*, ed. R. V. Kail, Jr., and J. W. Hagen (Hillside, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1977); J. H. Flavell, "Metacognition and Cognitive Monitoring: A New Area of Cognitive-Developmental Inquiry," *American Psychologist* 34:1 (1979): 906–11; A. L. Brown and J. S. DeLoache, "Skills, Plans, And Self-Regulation," in *Children's Thinking: What Develops?* ed. R. S. Siegler (Hillside, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1978); J. D. Bransford, R. Sherwood, N. Vye, and J. Rieser, "Teaching Thinking and Problem Solving," *American Psychologist* 41:10 (1986), 1078–89; J. D. Bransford, B. S. Stein, N. J. Vye, J. J. Franks, P. M. Auble, K. J. Mezynski, and G. A. Perfetto, "Differences in Approaches to Learning: An Overview," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 111 (1982): 390–98; A. L. Brown, J. D. Bransford, R. A. Ferrara, and J. C. Camione, " Learning, Remembering, and Understanding," in *Handbook of Child Psychology, Vol. 2: Cognitive Development*, ed. P. H. Mussen (New York: Wiley, 1983); E. M. Markman, "Comprehension Monitoring: Developmental and Educational Issues," in *Thinking and Learning Skills, Vol. 2: Research and Open Questions*, ed. S. F. Chipman, J. W. Segal, and R. Glaser (Hillside, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1985).

16. I have borrowed from Jennifer McCrickerd in developing this material. Jennifer McCrickerd, "Reading Philosophy," www.drake.edu/artsei/philrel/fachomepages/jenhomepage/ReadingPhilosophy.html (site no longer active).

17. I have borrowed some flagging notation from Meynell, "Reading Philosophy Actively," op. cit.

18. I am grateful to Paul Ranieri for insisting that I put this idea this way.

David W. Concepción, Philosophy and Religious Studies, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306; dwconcepcion@bsu.edu