

## Summary of Recommendations and Literacy Case Study:

### Reading:

Elliot is a very accurate, fast reader. He can get through a high level academic text with only making a few errors. He has a great memory and is able to remember several facts from the texts he reads. However, he has a hard time remembering the main ideas after he reads a text. He is able to list a few key points of the text, but unable to identify the core points that the author tries to get across in the writing. I think most of this comes from his desire to be a fast reader. He associates good reading with fast reading, which is detrimental when trying to comprehend harder text. Being involved in the debate team (and being extremely dedicated to that activity) has also contributed to his focus on reading quickly. In debate, he has to scan through cases as quickly as he can and find certain facts to pick out to support his arguments. As a result, sometimes he doesn't gain as much as he could from reading academic work for school. While debate has helped him tremendously in his oratory and argument skills, it seems to prevent him from focusing on his literacy skills. He is much more interested in the debate team than in his classes at school, which influences the amount of time he actually spends on reading and writing for class.

### Recommendations for Elliot to improve reading:

- SLOW DOWN – reading quickly isn't necessarily reading well
- Use active reading strategies – underline points that seem important and circle words that you don't understand
- Look up the words you don't understand and try to use them (this will help improve your vocabulary)
- Connect more with the text – write down questions for the author or about the text, write down predictions for what the characters will do next, make reading have a purpose
- Read more, when you find an author or a type of book that interests you, try to spend time reading – this will do more for your literacy than any other improvement strategies
- Explain/teach books you read to your friends, by teaching others, you will learn more yourself

### Writing:

Elliot is very good at stating his arguments and adding his personality to his writing. But, reading his work seems more like listening to him debate instead of reading his writing. He tends to state all of his arguments very quickly and sporadically. He does not back his arguments with evidence or explain his opinions fully. Elliot also uses many phrases that are unnecessary when writing and are typically reserved as 'debate phrases'. He is a good writer for being a high school senior, but he has a lot of room for improvement to be able to produce college level material. I think a lot of his difficulties with reading and writing come from his overwhelming practice in debate. Because he writes so quickly when forming debate speeches, this desire to produce fast work translates into his writing for other activities. He should learn to slow down when he

tries to produce high quality written work and to develop a style for writing that is more professional than his style for speaking.

Recommendations for Elliot to improve writing:

- Writing is different from debating, develop a different style
- Avoid debate phrases like “you cannot argue with the fact that”, “completely out of bounds” – they do not emphasize your points in writing like they do when debating
- Avoid unnecessary phrases like therefore, the fact that, obviously
- Do not use passive voice, make your writing as strong as your speaking by only using active verbs
- Practice! Write letters to the editor, stories, etc.
- EXPLAIN – do not make arguments without explaining them completely
- Offer evidence – your work will become more trustworthy by offering evidence to support your arguments

What I learned from this case study...

By studying Elliot’s literacy skills, I wanted to learn how upper level students became good readers and how to encourage them to stay involved in class when several students take longer to learn concepts. Elliot showed me that even advanced students need help with identifying areas for improvement. By spending a short amount of time with him individually, I saw the value of getting to know a student’s background before helping him become a better reader in writer. When I learned how important debate was to him and how that has helped him become a very articulate person, I could use that to identify a lot of the issues I saw with his reading and writing.

It was interesting to me how little encouragement it took for him to want to improve his literacy. When I gave him a copy of a book I thought he would like, he went home and read 5 chapters in 3 days. I don’t think I would have gotten every student or even most students in my class to read like that outside of class. He has a lot of goals for his life and is very focused on the next step (college), which I think is very common among advanced students. I think the reason a lot of them do not read for fun is that it takes a very rare student to value learning for the sake of learning in high school. This is a lesson I will try to use if I teach advanced students during my career. I learned that purpose is the most important lesson to teach students when teaching larger concepts in class. If the purpose of doing a classroom activity is just to get a good grade or to go to a good college, then the activity is probably not a good plan for the class. Students like Elliot need to be taught to value learning and I think they want some other reason to do well in school besides the focus on the next step.