What It Takes to Be Great—Reading the Text

Activity 9: Reading for Understanding

You have read the first three paragraphs and the conclusion. Now read the rest of the article silently. As you read, think about the predictions you made before you read the article, and then answer the following questions:

Of your original predictions, which were right? Which changed as you read the entire article?

What was surprising or most interesting to you?

What part of the text or idea would you like to understand better?

Activity 11: Considering the Structure of the Text—Labeling the Text

Now that you know what Colvin's "What It Takes to Be Great" is about, go back and reread it. Using a highlighter or pencil, mark and label the following on the article itself–use paragraph #'s

Where you think the article's introduction ends and why?

Where Colvin notes the question researchers wanted to answer (the problem they wanted to solve) by studying great performers

Where Colvin shares the researchers' findings/conclusions

The "elite performers" Colvin includes as evidence (list names with paragraph numbers)

Where you think the article's conclusion begins and why?

Now exchange your copy of "What It Takes to Be Great" with a partner. Read your partner's highlights and labels and then talk about what you each chose to mark. Compare and contrast your notes. Now, go back and change your own markings of the text in light of what you learned.

Activity 12: Topic Sentences

Good topic sentences are a necessary part of good writing. They let the reader know what is coming up and they also link the paragraph with the paragraph/s that came before it. The following is an example of one of Colvin's effective topic sentences with an explanation to why it is effective.

In paragraph 8: "The first major conclusion is that nobody is great without work."
This topic sentence is effective because it signals what is coming ahead in the article (an explanation of this "first conclusion" as well as other conclusions of the researchers). It is effective also because it connects with what came before it. In paragraphs 4-7, Colvin provides information about numerous studies that have been conducted as well as the key research question researchers have tried to answer. Here in paragraph 8, Colvin is clearly leading into the findings of the research, which he shares later in the article.

Now in groups, locate what you consider to be at least two other effective topic sentences in Colvin's article and explain what makes it effective. How does it prepare the reader for what follows? How does it help the reader better understand the information or ideas that came before?