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Level : L2

How to Read Effectively

University studies require a lot of reading, which is not always easy. There are many reasons why people may have difficulty understanding or remembering what they read. Sometimes they're too busy thinking about other things. Sometimes they haven't got enough sleep. Sometimes the vocabulary is too difficult. And sometimes they're simply not interested in the subject matter. This guide will show you how to cope with all these problems, read better and remember more. It guides you through reading handouts, articles, textbooks and books.

Before reading: Get ready

The attitude we adopt before reading determines our reading efficiency and success. Follow these guidelines and develop your own pre-reading attitude that sets you up for success.

- Determine **when** you are most alert. Do you concentrate best in the early morning? At lunch time? Late in the afternoon? In the evening? Find your optimum concentration time.
- Determine **where** you prefer to read. Do not look for perfect environment, but create your own atmosphere that helps you concentrate. You can do this through asking yourself some questions like: do you need to be in a comfortable, warm place, or does that kind of environment put you to sleep? Do you need to be in a brightly lit room? Or does softer lighting help you focus? Are you the kind of person that likes some background noise—a TV, radio, or people talking or do you need silence?
- If you're **preoccupied** with other tasks or concerns and the reading can wait a little, let it wait. Instead, see if there's something you can do to deal with those concerns. Then, when you're more relaxed, come back to your reading task. If it's not possible to wait, do your best to keep your attention on your reading. Keep reminding yourself that it has to get done, and that you can do nothing about your other concerns at the moment.
- **Be positive.** Tell yourself that no matter how difficult the reading task, you'll learn something from it. You'll become a better reader. You can understand, and you can remember.

Reading: Be an active reader

Have the attitude of an athlete, not a sports fan. Behave as if the author were in front of you and you were in conversation with him/her. The following strategies will help you achieve this.

1. Preview
2. Ask questions
3. Read and take notes
4. Summarize
5. Review and reflect

1. Preview

Preview the text to be read by skimming it. Skimming is the technique of allowing your eyes to travel rapidly over a page, stopping here and there to register the main idea. When skimming, you should follow the procedure below, adapting it to your purpose.

- Read the title.
- Note the writer's name.
- Note the date and place of publication.
- Read the first paragraph completely.
- Read sub-headings and first sentences of remaining paragraphs.

As you read, pick up main ideas, key words (words that tell you who, what, when, where, how many, and how much), and transition markers (words like 'however', 'alternatively', 'additionally', and so on), which suggest the direction of ideas in the text.

2. Ask Questions

Effective reading is active reading. To turn reading from a passive into an active exercise, always ask questions.

To do this, you must be clear about the purpose of your reading. If you are reading a text which you will be critiquing in detail, your questions will be different from those you would ask if you were reading a number of texts for background information. If you are gathering material for an essay, formulate some tentative ideas about the approaches you might take to your essay's outline, modifying them as you accumulate material.

During the preview, note as many questions as you can about the content. For instance, turn headings into **questions** and try to anticipate possible answers the writer may offer. Always actively look for **connections and relationships**. Look at the ways **ideas are structured and developed**.

The object of the preview and questioning steps is to determine the writer's thesis, that is, her/his main idea and purpose in writing.

3. Read and Take notes

As you read, list all the words about which you are uncertain; look them up in the dictionary and write down their definitions.

Some reasons for taking notes are:

- to maintain attentiveness as you read,
- to focus your attention,
- to analyze the assumptions and rhetorical strategies of the writer,
- to provide you with a summary of the material.

Some hints for taking notes:

- Always record bibliographical details of the text from which you are taking notes.
- Write on one side of the paper only.
- Leave a wide margin for comments and cross-references.
- Use headings, subheadings, and diagrams.
- Keep notes brief but full enough to still make sense to you in six months' time. Make sure they're legible.
- The **Cornell notetaking method** is a effective, along with **mind-mapping**.

4. Summarize

A summary is a collation of your notes, recording the main points the writer makes. Making a summary from your notes has two main benefits.

- It allows you to test yourself on your understanding of the material you have been reading - sometimes it is only when you try to put the writer's ideas into your own words that you understand better and uncover difficulties.
- It provides you with a compact account of the text for further reference.

Note: using a **Mind Map** to summarize is an excellent idea.

5. Review and reflect

To benefit fully from the time you've spent reading an article or chapter, it's important to review and reflect upon what you've read. This enhances your understanding and helps you to commit important facts and ideas to your long-term memory.

Here are some review and reflection exercises you may find useful:

- Test your understanding of the material by trying to answer your preview questions without referring to your notes.
- Write down the meaning and usefulness the material has for understanding other concepts and principles. Indicate what other ideas the material confirms, contradicts, or amplifies.
- Evaluate the text in terms of its informativeness, soundness of argument, relevance, and so on; (ask yourself, 'does it convince me?'). If you are gathering material for an essay or report, decide which points you want to use, and think about how you can use them.
- Start a reading journal in which you keep all reading, review, and reflection notes.

According to your personality and preferences, you may find other reading methods more adapted to you. Here's a summary of another famous, effective method. Before you apply it, divide your notebook as suggested by the Cornell method.

The SQ3R Reading Method

Survey! Question! Read! Recite! Review!

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| <p>Before you read, <u>S</u>urvey the text:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the title, headings, and subheadings • captions under pictures, charts, graphs or maps • review questions or teacher handouts • introductory and concluding paragraphs • summary |
| <p><u>Q</u>uestion while you are surveying:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn the title, headings, and/or subheadings into questions; • Read questions (if any) at the end of the text or after each subheading; • Ask yourself, "What did my instructor say about this chapter or subject when it was assigned?" • Ask yourself, "What do I already know about this subject?" <p>Note: If it is helpful to you, write out these questions for consideration (on the left column). This variation is called SQW3R</p> |
| <p><u>R</u>ead:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for answers to the questions you first raised; • Answer questions at the beginning or end of chapters or study guides • Reread captions under pictures, graphs, etc. • Note all the underlined, italicized, bold printed words or phrases • Study graphic aids • Reduce your speed for difficult passages • Stop and reread parts which are not clear • Read only a section at a time and recite after each section |
| <p><u>R</u>ecite after you've read a section:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orally ask yourself questions about what you have just read or summarize, in your own words, what you read • Take notes from the text (right column) but write the information in your own words • Underline or highlight important points you've just read • Summarize the whole document in the summary box at the bottom of your pages • Use the method of recitation which best suits your particular learning style but remember, the more senses you use the more likely you are to remember what you read - i.e., |

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| | <p>TRIPLE STRENGTH LEARNING: Seeing, saying, hearing- QUADRUPLE STRENGTH LEARNING: Seeing , saying , hearing, writing!!!</p> |
| <p>Review: an ongoing process.</p> | <p>Day One</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After you have read and recited the entire text, write questions in the margins for those points you have highlighted or underlined. Think about using the Cornell format. • If you took notes while reciting, write questions for the notes you have taken in the left hand margins of your notebook. <p>Day Two</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scan through the text and/or your notebook to re-acquaint yourself with the important points. • Cover the right hand column of your text/note-book and orally ask yourself the questions in the left hand margins (Cornell method). • Orally recite or write the answers from memory. • Make "flash cards" for those questions which give you difficulty. • Develop mnemonic devices for material which need to be memorized. <p>Days Three, Four and Five</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternate between your flash cards and notes and test yourself (orally or in writing) on the questions you formulated. • Make additional flash cards if necessary. <p>Weekend</p> <p>Using the text and notebook, make a Mind Map summarizing all the information you should know. Use different colors for different categories of ideas.</p> <p>Now that you have consolidated all the information you need for that text, periodically review the Map so that at test time you will not have to cram.</p> |

Adapted from [The SQ3R Reading Method - Study Guides and Strategies](http://www.studygs.net/texred2.htm)
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