

STUDENT NOTES FOR SUCCESS

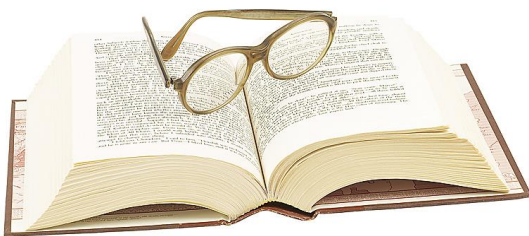
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Reading skills for university

What do you want to get out of a text? Good readers usually know why they are reading and what they want to get from a text. There are some techniques which will help you to achieve this. Read on!

Are you a good reader?

Good readers know the following things. First, they understand what their purpose is in reading and predict what they might find. Second, they follow the author's argument and look for patterns in the ideas. Third, they look at the context of the article and make connections between this new information and what they already know, and this helps them process and retain the information. Fourth, good readers select their reading material carefully and skim and scan texts to read more selectively and quickly. And fifth, good readers know that environment is an important factor in increasing productivity in their reading.



Some common student reading difficulties

Reading at university is very demanding. The problems you can face when reading include the following:

- dealing with the quantity of reading expected
- finding the right reading strategy for your purpose
- dealing with the language of different academic disciplines ('specialist' language)
- following the structure of an argument
- reading critically (that is, evaluating and questioning what you are reading) and
- understanding the rhetorical context of a text.

What is your purpose?

What are you reading and why are you reading it? Knowing your purpose can make you a more active reader. For example, if you read with an exam question in mind it will be easier to pick out the key points that you need, since you will be directing your reading, rather than being led by what you find. Your purpose will also affect the strategies you use for reading. Such strategies include:

- skimming and scanning
- reading for detail
- reading and summarising or taking notes
- reviewing 'old' material.

Skimming and scanning

Skimming (reading some of the text quickly to check) and scanning (searching for specific information) are techniques which help you to get an overview of what the author is saying in the article. You might first scan headings, skip to the conclusion and read the first lines of paragraphs. When you find what you are looking for, you can then 'dive in' and read in more detail. You might use these techniques when you are looking for articles that might be suitable for an assignment. Abstracts of journal articles also provide a very useful summary of the article's content and are another short-cut.

Reading for detail

At another time, you might read carefully and in detail the explanation of a theory that you need to understand. In this case you will read more slowly. You will pause and ask yourself questions or maybe even draw diagrams. You will re-read certain sections to check that you have understood. It is also useful with this sort



of reading to explain the ideas to yourself in simple language that you can remember.

Processing information and making notes

Making notes on what you read allows you to process the idea, question it, build on it and make links with other readings. You might think of examples the concepts may apply to, or you might question these concepts in your notes. Note-taking is one way of keeping your mind alert. Many students make the mistake, however, of taking too many notes. Simply copying whole sections may not be very useful for memory recall. The important thing is to summarise the main points and, if taking notes for a future assignment, jot down particular sentences or phrases that you think would be useful to quote. In this case you should always note the page number, as well as all other bibliographical details, as you will need to supply these in your assignment.

Reviewing 'old' material

This might involve re-reading lecture notes or articles or book chapters you read some time ago. If you are re-reading for exam purposes, it is a good idea to look at a selection of relevant exam questions first, as this will focus your reading. If you are re-reading for assignment purposes, then you may need to skim and scan as well as read in detail when you find relevant sections.

Take charge of your reading!

The following suggestions may help you to better tackle some of the reading you need to do at university.

Tackle difficult texts in stages

Texts can be difficult for a range of reasons, including the use of specialist terms and dealing with abstract theories or complex arguments. Being unfamiliar with certain terms can mean that you have trouble understanding an article. Making your own, short notes will help you to simplify the ideas. If you are faced with long lists in the original text, use your notes to 'chunk' items into categories. This will allow you to make complex information easier to follow.

If English is your second language, make notes but don't try to translate every word. Focus on following the argument of the author. Ask yourself: "What is the author really saying?"

Be an active and critical reader

Being an active reader will help you to understand texts, focus on essential messages and keep awake! When you are reading, you should constantly ask yourself questions about the points the author is making. Do you agree with the writer's point of view? Does this fit in with what you have already read? How does this apply to case studies you have analysed? Does this apply to what you have experienced in real life? Is the writer objective or are there signs of bias?

Read, apply and synthesise

In an assignment it is also likely that you need to *apply* theories to possible situations, examples or case studies. For example, if you read about cultural differences in Japan and Australia, you might think through how these would affect day-to-day business activities such as running meetings, negotiating with clients and so on. Such applications will help you to understand and remember what you read.

Know the context

Knowing the context of the article is also important. You will have a deeper understanding of an article if you know where a particular author or idea fits into the subject you are studying. Is this a controversial concept? Do other authors agree with this standpoint?

Create a conducive environment

Where and when you read will affect productivity. Relaxing the mind before reading can make you more receptive. Aim for quality of reading over quantity – short bursts of activity may be better than long hours where you are less alert - and be aware that your ability to concentrate will vary.

Find out more at the CBS Academic Communication Development website: <https://businesslaw.curtin.edu.au/study/student-experience/academic-communication-development/>

You might also be interested in *Handy Handout 21. Journal Articles*.

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