***Strategies for becoming an efficient and effective research reader***

Reading as a novice researcher involves refining current reading skills to address the volume, complexity and depth of reading. Different types of reading will require various strategies depending on an array of factors, particularly your level of knowledge and familiarity with the topic, and conceptual difficulty of the paper. Become aware of what strategies work well for you, and discuss reading challenges you encounter with more experienced researchers.

Reading for research purposes will pose challenges and concerns and hence consider strategies which may mitigate these challenges. For example, one challenge raised and discussed with the panel of experienced research candidates at Orientation on 21 Feb 2019 was ‘I feel there is so much reading to do. How do you manage it?’ The panel responses included:

* Track/compartmentalise/mentalise
* Read 2(4) articles a day
* Use *Excel* to list sources and key aspects of the reference according to your priorities – for example, Author | Date | Type of Source | Title | Contribution | Questions raised | Method | Relevant? | Future …
* Read review articles to develop an overview of the field, key authors, trends, questions, debates …
* Speed read – meaning skim, scan
* Write a summary
* Read **&&&&** write, plan your writing
* Use Bibliographic Management software, …

Some strategies to address other challenges/concerns experienced by new research students are as follows.

1. *My supervisors asked me to read 200 papers in the next two weeks.* 
   * Engage with this task as a way to develop a broad overview of the field
   * Develop a system to organise & connect with each paper – e.g. Excel/EndNote, main points
2. *I take about 4–6 hours to read a paper and worry about being too slow.*
   * Sometimes this will be the case, especially if the paper is central to your research and complex
   * If always the case, set a purpose for reading, then read selectively according to your purpose
   * First read the title, abstract and conclusion; then decide how much time you will take to read it
3. *I cannot remember what I have read.* (see Table 1)
4. *I feel as if I am drowning in the amount of reading I am doing.* 
   * Set time for the task of reading
   * Remove the complexity by trying to stay focused, set questions to find answers to.
5. *I have read about 40 papers related to my topic, but don’t know how to organise them to write about them.* 
   * Categorise, colourise, make visuals
   * Write an annotated bibliography – for each paper writing a short summary and commentary
6. *My supervisors have asked me to become more critical in my reading but I don’t know what this means and how to do it.*
   * Ask questions, e.g. How rigorous was this study? How is it relevant? How does it compare to others?
   * Discern how other writers critique other studies – e.g. identify strengths & weaknesses
7. *I am not sure if what I am reading is the best quality. How do I know the journal is a good quality journal?* 
   * Locate the impact factor and citation, i.e. how the journal is ranked in your field
   * Check the references and identify impact factors of these journals too
   * Discuss with your supervisor

**Table 1** Further suggested strategies to develop *research* reading skills

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| --- | --- |
| **Reading challenges** | **Strategies** |
| Takes too much time | * Be selective—initiate critical questions re selection of the reading, including assessment of the references used * Skim read—title, abstract, introduction, conclusion, diagrams, headings, topic sentences * Scan—read the sections in detail that are needed for your purposes * Set your purpose for reading, and focus your reading accordingly |
| Too hard, cannot understand | * ACCEPT this is NORMAL for all research—you are learning new abstract concepts and creating new ones! * TALK TALK TALK—have chats with your supervisors, peers, over coffee breaks, if desperate, explain it to your pet! * Join in informal discussion wherever they seem to happen—do NOT keep quiet! * Attend seminars and HEAR how others talk about concepts * Concepts—do a quick [www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com) to find an initial simple explanation * Discuss ***all challenges*** with your supervisory panel members * … |
| Can’t remember what I have read | * TALK TALK TALK – have chats with your peers, over walks, lunch! * Make visual overviews as you go! (Mind mapping is great!!)   http://www.visual-literacy.org/periodic\_table/periodic\_table.html   * Jot notes to yourself and in your writing book * Add research notes into EndNote/Mendeley/Zotero * Use Trello/EverNote/Scrivener software to make comprehensive notes |
| Terminology | * Concepts—do a quick online search * Terminology—create your own dictionary (Alphabetical) |
| Link reading to writing | * As you read write down useful phrases, expressions, examples * Prepare some *Powerpoint* slides to explain the ideas—for 1st year undergraduate students |
| How to be critical? | * Ask questions … |

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