



Strategies for effective and efficient reading

Sometimes the amount of reading you are expected to do at university can be overwhelming. You will usually be expected to read more widely than the set textbook by using other sources such as: journal articles, online sources, chapters in books, and reports. Therefore, developing your ability to read effectively and efficiently is highly valuable.

Reading purposes

What and how much you read at university will depend on the **purpose** of your reading. Your purpose should also determine how you approach the particular text you are reading.

Identifying relevant readings

Before you read an article, think about the following questions to decide if it is worth reading:

- Who wrote it? Is this a reliable source?
- When was it written? Is the information still current?
- Who was it written for? Who is the intended audience?
- Why was it written? What was the purpose of the author?

Skim reading to gain an overview of a reading text

When your purpose is to gain an overview of reading (to prepare for a lecture or to decide if a reading is useful), you don't need to read everything in detail. Firstly, look at the layout to help you gain a better understanding of how the information is organised, and look for key features:

- headings
- sections
- tables and diagrams
- use of **bold** or *italics* to highlight ideas
- in-denting, boxes, and numbering

Then, skim over the following sections to get a general idea of the content:

- the title
- abstract
- headings and sub-headings
- introduction, conclusion and summary
- objectives
- glossaries
- review questions (in a textbook)

Reading for main ideas

Start by thinking about the title:

- What do you already know about the topic?
- What can you predict about the content from the title?



Skim read to gain an overview of a reading text (see above for details). Now read the article in more detail. Reading the following sections first will give you a better understanding of the main ideas:

- abstract (if there is one)
- the introduction, conclusion or summary
- the first paragraph in each section
- the first and last sentence of each paragraph

Reading for specific information

You may want to find the answer to a particular question in your reading. To do this, you need to:

- **skim read to gain an overview of a reading text (see above for details);**
- scan to locate the relevant section(s) that you may need;
- focus on reading with the specific information in mind – it may help to keep a visual image of what you are looking for in your mind;
- run your eyes over the reading text to find specific information – you do not need to read every word so try to stop yourself doing this, and
- when you find something that may be relevant read the sentences before and after to confirm whether you need to read the section in more detail.

Reading for exams

Have a look at past exam papers to consider how much and to what depth you need to revise e.g. your review notes or chapter summaries. Depending on how much you remember, you may need to read some sections in more detail.

Tips for difficulties with reading

Sometimes the readings can be hard to understand, especially when you are still early in the course. Remember that it is not necessary to understand every single word in everything that you read. Try the following strategies:

- even though you don't understand every word, see if you can get the main point(s) the author is making;
- focus on key sections—introduction, conclusion, topic sentences;
- if you are unfamiliar with specialised words related to the topic, make a list of frequently-occurring words and try to find their meaning elsewhere (e.g. in a subject-specific dictionary), and
- compile a list of questions to find the answers elsewhere, via other students, lecturers or a simpler reading on the same topic.

References

Glendinning, EH & Holmstrom, B 1992, *Study reading: A course in reading skills for academic purposes*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
Marshall, L & Rowland, M 1999, *A guide to learning independently*, Longman, Melbourne.
Northedge, A 1990, *The Good Study Guide*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press.
Taylor, G 1992, *The student's writing guide: for the Arts and Social Sciences*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.



Useful links *(all open in a new window)*

Visit the links below for:

- [Tips to help you develop active reading skills \(UNSW\)](#)
- [Tips on using English for academic purposes \(UEfAP\)](#)
- [Templates for critical readings of texts \(Study Guides and Strategies\)](#)
- [Anatomy of an article to help you identify key parts of scholarly texts \(NCSU\)](#)

There may be resources that have been created with your lecturers, addressing assignment tasks and topics specific to your courses. Follow the links below to find out:

[Business](#)

[Education, Arts and
Social Sciences](#)

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