Slide 1: Introduction

Welcome to a presentation on Efficient Reading. In order to keep up with your reading load, you have to read efficiently. If you read without knowing why you are reading or passively, you will just be wasting your time. It will also take you longer to absorb what you read. This presentation will address some strategies that will show you how you can get maximum benefits by reading efficiently. The presentation will begin with an explanation on what efficient reading is and then continue with scanning, skimming, detailed reading and spotting navigation aids. These strategies are associated with efficient reading.

Slide 3: What is Efficient Reading?

Efficient Reading means reading with a purpose and being an interactive reader. In the first instance, you need to know why you are reading the text. Are you looking for information to complete your assignment or do you need to find specific answers to tutorial questions? Knowing the purpose for which you are reading will ensure that you do not waste time reading every word in the text. If you know the questions that you want answered, you can then directly go to the sections which may hold the answers. You can do this by scanning and skimming before you actually do detailed reading. If you do this, you would save a lot of time and get through your readings quickly.

Do also make sure you engage with the text you read. Use your background knowledge of the language, subject and the world to predict and assess what you are reading. Be critical of what you read by going beyond the text, the author’s background, evidence used and assumptions made.

Slide 3: Scanning

When you scan a text, you move your eyes quickly over the page to find particular words or phrases that are relevant to the task. For example, say that you need to write an essay about the importance of reflective teaching and you are reading a journal article about the topic. Before you begin, identify what you know by listing words or phrases that are associated with the topic. In
this instance, it would be words or phrases such as reflection, reflecting, critical thinking and collaboration. Then move your eyes quickly across the pages to find these words. Sometimes it is useful to scan an introduction or preface (or abstract) of a book or journal article; first or last paragraphs of chapters (or articles) and the concluding chapter (or paragraph) of a book (or article) even before you begin reading to identify their relevance to the information you are seeking.

Slide 4: Skimming

Once you have found the words or phrases that you have been looking for, you would then practise skimming. When you skim, you read a sentence or sentences quickly to get the main point and skip the details or examples. For instance, if you were reading the article on reflective teaching, after you find the phrase ‘reflective teaching’, you would read the sentence ‘Reflective teaching involves teachers’ self-evaluation of their practical theory...’ quickly to see if the information is useful for your essay. This would give you the gist and you can decide to read this paragraph or skip it. Skimming would be useful to preview a passage before reading in detail and to refresh your understanding after carrying out detailed reading.

Slide 5: Detailed Reading

You would only practise detailed reading once you have found the information that you have been looking for. Detailed reading is only practised after scanning and skimming text to locate sections that would be relevant to the questions you want addressed. When you do detailed reading, you would be reading every word from the text. You may want to take notes and record the source. A dictionary becomes handy when you come across new vocabulary.

Slide 6: Spotting Navigation Aids

Reading efficiently also means spotting the navigation aids that authors use to signal the reader about their next line of argument. Texts are filled with navigation aids such as sequence signals, i.e. “Three advantages of...”; “A number of methods are available...” The first sentence of a paragraph indicates a topic sentence. The key or main idea is communicated in a topic sentence. The statements that follow in the paragraph are supporting statements. For example if you are reading a section on ‘Video as a Tool for Education’ in order to answer some tutorial questions, the topic sentence which is ‘The presence of video in society serves several purposes...’ informs you that the discussion in the paragraph is going to be about what the purposes are. If you think that this information would be useful, then continue reading the text. Identifying navigation aids such as topic sentence, sequence signals, linking words, etc. saves the reader a lot of time.

Now that you have some strategies for active reading and efficient reading, why don’t you give it a go? Use a journal article or text book to practise all these strategies. The more you do it, the better become at it.