

Efficient reading strategies

Quick study guide

Skimming

Sometimes you need to get the general idea or gist of a text. Reading every word is not the way to do this. Few text books were written with your specific course or assignment in mind, so you need to adapt the material to your particular purposes, given the course and the task at hand.

Skimming is the sort of reading which would be appropriate if your tutor asked you to read several books and articles for the next tutorial. She would not expect you to be able to recite it word for word, but she will want you to be able to discuss the issues raised. Skimming allows you to locate and comprehend the main ideas quickly, ignoring the specific details.

You might try reading quickly through the table of contents, the preface or the abstract, and then select relevant sections from the chapter headings. A useful general strategy is to read the first and last paragraphs and perhaps the first and last sentence of each of the other paragraphs. Don't forget to check any diagrams and figures as they are information-dense. You should get about 50% of the meaning from this process and you are then in a good position to see if you need to employ scanning or detailed reading.

Scanning

You skim read material to get the general picture. To discover precise information you will need to practise the technique of scanning. You may need to find out specific details of a topic for an assignment or a task that your lecturer has set. There is little point in skimming a whole book for this purpose. After all, you wouldn't carefully read the whole movie guide if you wanted to see a particular film!

You should identify a few key terms or expressions which will alert you to the fact that your subject is being addressed. You can then run your eyes down the page looking for these expressions - in chapter headings or sub-headings, or in the text itself. You would scan for details such as a name, number, formula, date or location.

Detailed reading

Some subject areas such as Law and Literature, for example, require a very detailed understanding by the student. In these cases, reading every word can be appropriate. This can be combined with scanning for greater efficiency. If it is a photocopy or your own book, take full advantage by underlining or highlighting and using the margins for your own comments or questions.

Revision reading

This involves reading rapidly through material with which you are already familiar, in order to confirm knowledge and understanding. Consider summarising main points onto small system cards (these can be bought at any newsagency and carried with you) or on your mobile devices.

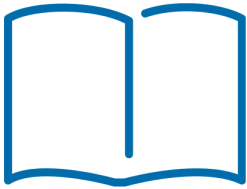
Stages in reading a text

In order to read more effectively, it is vital to become a self-conscious reader. You need to understand what you are doing when you use different reading techniques for different purposes and texts, and to practise these particular reading skills. You must always read for a clearly defined purpose and adapt your reading strategies to that purpose.

It is important to break down the reading process into the following stages: before reading, during reading and after reading.

Before reading survey the text so that you can get an overview of the book, article or section.

First, get an overview of the text:



- Understand the title.
- Examine the organisation of the information in the table of contents.
- Read headings and subheadings.
- Look at graphs, diagrams, tables.
- Read any questions or summaries at the end of the chapter.
- Read the introduction and conclusion.
- Read the first and last sentence in each paragraph.

Now you are ready to read in detail the section/s relevant to your purpose.



As you read closely follow the development of the ideas in the text:

- Avoid the temptation to read **every** word.
- Read actively - write in the margins, highlight phrases, write summaries, take note of major and minor points.
- Read critically - ask yourself questions; for example, Is the argument logical? Is it biased? Is there enough evidence to support the author's conclusions? Is the information dated?

When you finish reading think over what you have read. Make a brief summary of the main ideas and concepts in the text.

