

Reading efficiently

This Study Advice Sheet introduces you to some basic reading skills that can help you read more efficiently and enable you to get the most from your reading.

We read for a number of reasons:

- Reading for essays
- Reading for reports
- Reading for tutorials
- Reading for revision
- Reading for understanding

There are several skills involved with the reading process, including:

- The actual reading itself
- Prioritising the information you find
- Recording that information in a useful way

Reading for different reasons

We read for many different reasons and for many different purposes. The reading that you do for your studies is often different from reading for leisure. Perhaps the most important difference is the way in which you actually work through the materials:

- You open a novel at the first page and read right through to the end.
- However, you might only refer to a particular chapter in an academic textbook, or flip through for a diagram or chart containing information.

In each case you are reading for different reasons.

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Key reading strategies

- **Establish a purpose for your reading**
- **Define reading goals**
What questions do you need answering?
- **Adopt a reading style to suit your needs**
Do you need to read everything?

Do you need to read each section consecutively?
- **Prioritise information**
What is relevant or irrelevant?
- **Be flexible**
If a text doesn't appear to have the relevant information, put it down and find another

Active and passive reading

The most significant difference between the two main styles of reading is that one is active and involving and the other is passive requiring little thought.

When you are searching for something, delving into a text, pulling out distinct elements, you are reading actively.

You read passively when you let the text guide you, reading everything without question.

You read actively when you are pursuing the answer to a question.

Reading goals

If you establish reading goals, posing questions that you need answered, you will read more effectively.

Reading goals will help you to prioritise the information you read. You will only read that information which seems necessary by asking such questions as:

- What is centrally relevant?
- What is partially relevant?
- What is simply irrelevant?

This will help you learn more effectively, prolonging your memory's retention rate.

Reading with a pen

When you are reading for your studies you will need to take notes, sifting out information that will be of use both in the long and short term.

It is therefore essential that you read with a pen and actively take notes throughout your reading.

Different ways of ordering and structuring notes are discussed in another Study Advice Sheet called Taking Notes.

Different reading styles

Once you have established your reading goals, you can choose the mode of reading most suited to your task. This will make your reading more efficient by cutting down on the amount you need to read.

The following types of reading are commonly used and you will probably recognise many of them from your existing reading patterns:

i) Skimming or browsing

The main aim is to discover how useful the text or book might be and for what purpose you may wish to use it.

Skimming involves going through a text rapidly, probably at two or three times your normal reading speed and being selective.

Look at the index, chapter headings, introductory and concluding paragraphs, as well as skimming through the main content by reading the first line of each paragraph. This will give you a feel for the flavour of the book.

Skimming is useful for deciding whether or not you are going to use the book in much the same way that you would flip through a book or magazine in a bookshop.

Skimming will help you get some idea of the way the text is organised, its tone and style, to get the gist of the writer's meaning or to review something you have already read, refreshing your memory.

ii) Scanning

Scanning is used when you know exactly what you are looking for, for example when you are looking for a telephone number in a telephone directory or for the times of trains in a train timetable.

Scanning is little more than a visual matching task; find the word or phrase you're searching for and then follow the text.

iii) Search Reading

Search reading is used to look for key words and phrases which will help you to locate specific information.

Look in the index to find the location of key words and topics. Then locate these in the main body of the text by passing your eyes through your text until you find the words or phrases you are interested in. Words and phrases which are not closely related need no more than a passing glance.

Remember that the author's key words may not be the same as yours, so be flexible.

(iv) Receptive Reading

This is used when you need a good general understanding or to discover accurately what has been written. It may also be used to give you food for thought, or to prompt you to think creatively and reflectively.

When reading receptively, you need time to pay close attention to the text, perhaps allowing for periods in which to reflect on what you have read, working through the text in sequence, at a moderate speed. You will probably have skimmed through the text to see what it contains, making appropriate notes.

Try these different reading styles out. Think about why you are reading and apply the style most suited to that need.

Remember that even with this type of reading practice you can improve your reading speed without affecting your level of comprehension.

SQ3R

Reading with purpose

SQ3R is a useful technique that can be used with most kinds of reading. It stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recall and Review.

- **Survey:** quickly look for basic information using contents listing, index, main headings, etc.
- **Question:** note down questions you want answered to keep your reading active
- **Read:** varying your reading style and speed, identify and read the section which will answer your questions; make brief notes if this helps
- **Recall:** try to answer your questions without looking at the notes or reading material
- **Review:** look back over the text to check if your information is accurate

Reading efficiently

Efficient reading is more than simply reading everything at a greater speed.

You will achieve a greater time saving if you ask what you are reading and adopt a reading strategy to suit that need.

Think and question more, read less.

Further information

This Study Advice Sheet has been produced by Student Services at UW.

We support student learning across the University through the publication of materials such as these.

Other study advice sheets that you may find useful include:

Essay Writing

Learning at university

Learning journals

Making oral presentations

Minimising stress

Organising yourself

Plagiarism & referencing

Revision and exam skills

Study at a distance

Taking notes

Using feedback to improve your work

What does the question mean?

Working in groups

Writing reports

All study advice sheets are available to view and download on the following website:

www.worcester.ac.uk/studyskills

or you can follow the links from your SOLE page.

You may also find it useful to check out the '**Moving On**' pack, accessible from the link on your SOLE page.

'**Moving On**' is a study skills package specifically designed to help you prepare for Higher Education & to become a successful student.

Contact: studyskills@worc.ac.uk

Reading checklist

- **Establish a purpose for your reading**
Define reading goals
- **Ask questions of the text**
Why are you reading?
What do you want to find out?
- **Adopt a reading style to reflect your needs**
Vary the way you read according to the information you are seeking
- **Be methodical**
Don't simply read for long periods of time - plan your reading activities for each text and each subject
- **Prioritise information**
What is centrally relevant?
What is partially relevant?
What is simply irrelevant?
- **Be flexible**
If the book or journal does not provide you with the answers that you need, be prepared to put it straight down and turn to another.
Abandon it once you have checked for the information you want.
- **Control your environment**
Make sure you have sufficient light, but avoid glare.
- Reading is best done with light coming from above, or over one shoulder, and it should not be reflected back at you.
- Avoid too harsh a contrast between your reading pool of light and the light in the surrounding area.
- If you suffer from eyestrain or headaches take a break from reading and think about getting your eyes checked by an optician. This could be a sign that you are straining them.
- Remember to adopt a comfortable reading position and posture to reduce body fatigue and mental strain. This will enable you to work more effectively and, if necessary, for longer.
- Speed reading can be useful, but initially greater benefit is to be gained by rationalising your reading.