EFFICIENT READING

Efficient reading is developing effective reading strategies that match your purpose for reading. It is an active process and involves making decisions about what you are looking for and how you can locate it.

Reading strategies

Focus on what you want to find out from the text and choose an appropriate reading strategy to meet your reading goals.

Surveying – pre-reading

This strategy helps you decide if the text is useful for you, i.e. does it have the type of information you want, on the topic you want

How to survey

Look quickly over the text. Ask yourself:

- What is it about? What is likely to be covered?
- How does this fit with what I already know about the topic?
- Is it useful for my purpose?
- Is it a current, authoritative, academically suitable text?

Skimming

Skim (look over) the whole text and read quickly to find:

- the general idea
- the focus of the content.

How to skim

Read the title, the abstract or summary, or the cover blurb or the table of contents (if a book). Identify information that tells the reader what the text is about. Note the main points.

Read the introduction and conclusion. Focus on an overview and/or summary of the main points.

Read any headings, sub-headings and words in bold or italics, illustrations. Note key words.

Read the topic sentence of each paragraph (usually the first sentence), and noting the main idea of each paragraph.

Look for linking words that show the connections between ideas, e.g. in addition, because, however.

Scanning

Scan the text quickly to find:

- specific information
- particular details or knowledge from the text.

How to scan

Look for key words, phrases or names. Look for capital letters and numbers.

Move your eyes quickly and systematically over the page.

STUDY TIPS

EFFECTIVE READING

Effective reading is also linked to critical thinking, active note-making and mind mapping. It is also affected by your level of knowledge of the subject matter.

Understanding what you read

Active reading

As an active reader, you should:

- have a purpose in mind when you read, e.g. developing an overview of the main ideas in a text, or locating specific evidence from research to support an argument in your assignment

- think about how the texts you are reading fits in with what you already know about the topic

- take notes as you read, make notes and summaries, create diagrams/mind maps as you go with full reference details.

By being an active reader, you can make good choices about **what** you read and **how** you read.

Dealing with unfamiliar words and concepts

Often the journal articles you read are written for professionals and experts in the field. If you find it difficult to process the information, it can be helpful to:

- refer to general text books that introduce the ideas for students to build your background knowledge

- identify new and important terminology in the introduction or abstracts of what you read; these key words can be important to understand before you continue reading

- focus first on a general understanding of the ideas rather than on individual words.

Dealing with new terminology

University study will increase your vocabulary, both general and professional. With new terminology it is often useful to start with contextual clues — that is, the words or situation around the unfamiliar word — that can help you work out the meaning.

For understanding new terms, look for the following:

- Restatement of ideas – restates or explains the meaning of new or key words. Look for these words: 'or', 'in other words', 'that is' (i.e.).

- Examples – explain the meaning by giving examples. Look for the following language: 'such as', 'for example', 'including', 'for instance'.

- Comparison – complex words are often compared to more familiar or standard vocabulary. Look for these linking words: 'like', 'as', 'as if', 'similar to'.

Reading more effectively

- Pre-reading strategies are effective in ensuring useful outcomes from your research reading. Don't waste time reading material that isn't useful or relevant.

- Active reading techniques improve cognition and learning. Reading actively increases understanding by connecting what you are reading with what you already know, and also helps identify what you need to find out.

- Creating diagrams, flow charts and/or mind maps can be useful to organise information and increase understanding.

For more tips on research reading, look at Learning Lab: Critical reading.