

LEARNING AND INFORMATION SERVICES

Guide to Effective Reading

What is effective reading?

Reading for academic study can be different from reading for leisure. When reading a novel you would read the book from cover to cover but academic reading can be more of a selective process. You will often only read the chapters or pages that are relevant to the subject you are researching.

By reading effectively you will learn to question and survey the text you are reading to gain a better understanding of your subject. By improving your reading skills you can reduce unnecessary reading time and this will enable you to read in a more focused manner.

Why is reading important?

Reading is an important way to gain information and will underpin much of your academic study including researching and writing assignments, revising for exams and following up on information taught in lectures. Most academic reading is motivated by the need to find and understand information and develop ideas and arguments.

Before you start reading

Before you start reading it is important to consider how much detail is required and the amount of time you are able to dedicate to the task. This will help you set realistic goals of what you can accomplish within a given time. It is helpful to approach reading by developing a basic understanding of the topic before studying it in depth.

Top Tips for reading effectively

1. **Your reading list** provides a good starting point for reading materials relevant to your course. Reading lists usually include a mixture of both essential and recommended reading.
2. **Go beyond your reading list** to find additional reading materials (including books, e-books, journal articles) to expand your subject knowledge.



3. **Be selective about what you read** and remember you can't read everything. Don't spend time reading in detail without first checking how relevant the text is. You can do this by:

- **Surveying** the text by looking at the table of contents, chapter headings, abstracts and summaries. This will help you assess the material so you can decide if it contains the information you need.
- **Scanning** to get a general feel for the text. Look over the material quickly for key words, headings and illustrations. You can get an idea of what the text is about by reading the first and last sentence of each paragraph.

4. **Reading critically** is detailed reading of a text. After deciding if it is relevant, you will sometimes need to analyse, question and evaluate what you are reading. Some useful questions include asking yourself:

- Who is the author/source? Are they credible?
- What is the main argument?
- What evidence does the author use to support the argument?
- Do you agree with the author, if so why?/why not?
- How can you use this information (assignment/report/presentation)?

5. **Make notes** to help you remember key points. Your notes will prove useful when writing assignments and revising for exams.

6. **Take regular breaks** when you are reading or studying. Reading for short periods of time of about 20-30 minutes should be enough to really focus on the text and take in as much as possible.

7. **Read in a positive environment** that is comfortable and free of distractions as this will help improve your concentration.

8 **Use an effective reading strategy** such SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recall and Review). This is a useful technique that will help you read purposefully.

Survey	Look over material critically. Skim through the text to get a general idea of what it is about and help you to decide whether it is of any use to you.
Question	Can this text help you? Does it give you any useful information that you can use? Asking questions will help you to stay focused on your subject.
Read	Make a more careful and detailed reading of the text. Still try to remain focused on your reason for reading this text. Make notes of any key points.
Recall	Put the text and your notes to one side and try to recall the information you have read.



Review	Re-read the text to check your understanding and clarify any points you were uncertain about.
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Help and Advice

For help and advice on any aspect of effective reading, including details of Reading and Note-making workshops please see the Skills for Learning website at <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/skills>.

Further reading

Books offering advice on effective reading are available in the Study Skills collections in the Learning Centres and as part of our e-book collection.

Godfrey, J. (2010) *Reading and making notes*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Metcalfe, M. (2006) *Reading critically at University*. London: Sage.



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