Reading Tips

As a student a great deal of your time will be taken up with reading, and the ability to make sense of the texts you read is one of the most important aspects of life as a student. You will be expected to read from your textbooks, readings books, lecture notes, journal articles, and library texts. Reading is a core skill as it links directly into the ability to research, which you will be expected to engage in continuously, as evidence of wide reading on the specific topic.

Reading is about finding the meaning in a written text. Efficient, effective readers don’t read every word (at least not initially) and they don’t stop when they come across a word they don’t know. Efficient readers:

- predict,
- guess,
- skip over words because they know the meaning can often be worked out from the rest of the next sentence, paragraph or section.
- skim along looking for meaning, which is found in chunks of words.

To be an efficient, effective reader you need to have a clear purpose in mind before you begin reading. This gives you a goal and a purpose for reading, and makes it easier for you to target in on the information you need to get from the text.

Our first step will be to examine your reading habits so you can identify the ineffective reading habits you now have, and then learn new habits that will allow you to read as quickly as possible without losing the meaning of the text. Our last step will be to look at different strategies you can use for different types of reading.

Environmental factors affecting reading

It’s important to analyse your current reading habits. These reading habits will be influenced by many different factors which can be classified generally as environmental, personal and skills.

There are several external factors that influence how well you read:

- where and when you read
- what and why you read

Where and when you read can also affect your ability to focus on your reading. It may be easy to read a newspaper or magazine in a noisy food hall, but for more complex reading you may need to find a quiet place where you can concentrate more fully. Additionally, some people find that they read better at certain times of the day such as in the early morning. All of these factors vary, of course, from individual to individual.

- Consider the following environmental factors that might be distracting for you and reduce your concentration when reading:
- Do you like a lot of sound when you read? Does talking, music or general noise affect your concentration?
- Do you need a lot of light? Or fresh air?
• Where do you feel most comfortable reading? Where do you concentrate the best on complex pieces of text? Does it depend upon what you are reading and why?
• Do you like to be warm or cool when you read? Do you read best sitting under a fan, or snuggled up in bed?
• Do you find that with the morning light reading becomes easier or harder?

**Process Exercise 19**

List several factors either environmental or personal which may determine effectiveness of your reading?

*The way you’re feeling* can also make it more difficult to focus on your reading. For example, if you are worried about something, it may be more difficult for you to focus and concentrate on reading.

**Understanding and remembering**

The third factor that affects your reading is how much you understand and remember when you read. Do you understand and remember most of what you read, or do you have to re-read a few times before you understand what has been written? Look at the table on the following page and think about your remembering of written text in the following circumstances.

**How to Read a Text**

This involves five stages:

1. Preparation (which we have already covered in the preceding pages)
2. Overview reading the text in its entirety to gain an overall ‘impression’
3. Preview to locate the clues which will provide a generalised meaning.
4. Analysing the text to decipher meaning, and intention of the author
5. Review for evaluation and synthesis of the information

**Reading strategies**

These are the MAIN strategies you need to use when reading the academic books and articles. You may already use them in other types of reading situations.

The three reading strategies are:

1. **PREVIEW** which includes Pre-Reading, Scanning and Skimming
2. **READ** which includes Note-Taking,
3. **REVIEW** which includes Research, Writing Summaries, Paraphrasing, and Referencing. (*This latter will be explored in Module 4 Academic Writing*)

**Preview the Text**
In various articles these titles may vary but the importance of ideas remain the same.

**Pre-reading**
Pre-reading, (surveying) in which you develop an overview of the material you are trying to understand.

**Scanning**
Scanning, in which you extract the main ideas from a piece of writing.

**Skimming**
Skimming, in which you quickly read the whole article to locate a certain point of fact in a piece of writing.

1. **Pre-reading**

Pre-reading is the first reading strategy to be used. It gives you **background knowledge** so you can make sense of the material more easily.

It should be used first with all written material, because it lets you decide:

- whether you need to read the material at all!
- which sections are most relevant for you
- how much detail you will need

**Before beginning to read**, the following will provide important clues:

1. **Work out what the text is about**: does the heading/title give you an idea of the subject?
2. **What topics are covered?**: look at the table of contents, the index or headings and sub-headings
3. **Are there diagrams/pictures that explain the text?**
4. **Read the introduction/summary on the cover of the book to see if it looks relevant to your needs.**
5. **Read chapter summaries** for an outline of the chapter.
6. **Read the topic sentences of the paragraphs**: this gives you an idea of the main points covered.
7. **Read the conclusion or last paragraph or last sentence**: writers often sum up what they have said in the last chapter, paragraph or sentence.
8. **How current is the text?** check to see when the text was published (usually found on the page after the title page).

2. **Scanning**

When you scan a text, you are **extracting its basic framework**. Scanning involves skipping the unimportant words such as ‘the’, ‘and’ ‘a’ ‘an’ and so on - and reading only the key words or words that contain the ideas. See how this works in the following process exercise.

**Activity:**

Aborigines .........lived.. Kakadu ........... least 25,000 ....... (perhaps as long as 50,000 ..........), making ..........park one ............ few World Heritage sites ..... listed ..... both natural ......cultural reasons. Today, Aboriginal people work in partnership ............ Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service ...... determining park policy ...... young
Aborigines trained rangers guides. Learning Aboriginal legends sacred sites enhances visitors appreciation of Kakadu.

June September main tourist season. Visiting the "wet" season (December March), difficult although the park green bountiful wildflowers birds, many tracks flooded inaccessible.

During warm climate "dry", wildlife concentrated large numbers around water holes. The Parks Wildlife Service conducts free talks, walks, and slide shows independent travellers. Walking tracks vary length grade pass through woodlands, grassy flood plains, wetland, monsoon rainforests sandstone country.

from: http://www.gorp.com/gorp/location/australi/park/no_kakad.htm

The main idea of this paragraph is still easy to understand; even though some words have been deleted (this processing by your brain is similar to that we looked at in an earlier Process Exercise). This exercise also shows you how scanning saves time by reducing the number of fixations on each line. It is a good idea to get into the habit of scanning material before you read it – in fact you probably already do this to a large extent.

3. Skimming

Skimming is used to locate a particular point in the text that needs to be read in detail. You already use skimming all the time, for example when you look for a telephone number or your name on a class list, you are skimming. In this kind of rapid reading, your eyes move quickly over words or figures until you find the piece of information you want to find. Once you have found that piece of information you can read in greater detail. Skimming is directed and very purposeful, and as such is extremely fast, especially when material is arranged in numerical or alphabetical order. The ‘trick’ is to keep in mind the specific information you are looking for, and you will find that if you do this the information will ‘jump out’ at you!

Activity

These exercises will demonstrate the usefulness and speed of skimming for specific information.

In each of the following paragraphs, you should skim to find specific information. Do not read closely. Skim across each line smoothly, looking only for a date, a name, or a fact that answers the question which precedes each paragraph. You should find each answer in five seconds.

1. When was Amenemhet III pharaoh of Egypt?

___________________________________________________________

Petrie first dug into the pyramids at Giza in 1880 and then went on in 1889 to a pyramid near the Nile. Here he came upon the burial place of Amenemhet III, one of the great pharaohs of Egypt around 1800B.C. The discovery was important in itself, but it also led Petrie to devise a system of classifying and grouping archaeological finds which is still used.

2. Who was the most famous king of the West Saxons?

___________________________________________________________
In the eighth century, Northumbrian power declined and the centre of influence moved southward to Mercia, the kingdom of the Midlands. A century later the centre shifted again, and Wessex, the country of the West Saxons, became a leading power. The famous king of the West Saxons was Alfred the Great, who reigned in the second half of the ninth century, dying in 901. He was famous not only as a military man and administrator but also as a champion of learning. He founded supported schools and translated or caused to be translated many books from Latin in English.

As these examples show, you do not need to read all the words to find the information you need. Skimming text allows you to move quickly through texts to find specific information. Being familiar with these different ways of reading material will be very important as you move through your tertiary studies as they will allow you to choose the correct type of reading for specific tasks, and save you a lot of time!