

ACADEMIC READING

Start with a focus

Try to have some questions in mind before you start reading; what would you like you learn? These questions may be based on an essay or assignment, or other discussions in your module. For example, if you sit down to read about the fire of London, your focus will depend on whether you are studying literature, engineering, culture, or health. If you would like to know specifically about the causes of the fire, you can concentrate on different parts of a text than if you are reading for information about the health implications.

Skimming: Use the tools in texts

If you start with a focus, then you can make use of parts of the text designed to point the reader in the right direction: the table of contents, the abstract, the index, appendices, glossaries, introductions, conclusions, headings, subheadings, sections, chapters, etc. There is rarely a need to read the whole text (book, article, etc) thoroughly from beginning to end. This can be helpful when you're trying to figure out if a text is relevant to your work or to identify key sections worth reading more carefully.

Scanning: Looking for keywords

Again, if you are looking for keywords, you can scan through the text looking for relevant terms. Then you can find areas of the text worth reading more thoroughly.

Prioritising

You won't have unlimited access to all texts; for example, library books on your topic might be in high demand and therefore have a short lending period. If you can identify what you want to know from a text, then you can consider how worthwhile it is. That way you can decide what you need to read first and what's worth taking out of the library or copying.

Using the reference list to your advantage

If you are researching a particular topic it can be useful to look at the reference list of any texts you find helpful; the references listed can point you in the direction of other useful texts and call your attention to seminal studies and/or influential researchers in your field.

Notes, Highlighting, and Underlining: Meaning and Reference

Everyone has their own way of working with a text. Again, much depends on your purpose for reading a text. Do you need to remember key dates and names, or are you more interested in the underlying causes of an event? Photocopying key parts of texts can be useful if you want to highlight or make notes. Try to not only highlight or underline key parts of the text, but also to respond with your ideas and thoughts. Again, having a clear focus will help you know what to pay attention to in the text. Remember that if a book does not belong to you, you should either use a pencil and later erase all your marks or not write in the text at all. Also, if you note anything down, remember to remind yourself of what text it came from: **you won't be able to use the information to support any claims unless you can your reader where the evidence came from.**

Reverse outlining: Read like writer

Try to imagine what notes the writer might have used when writing the text. Can you make an outline of the main argument and points made to support the claim? What kind of evidence is used? Highlight or make notes on these points.

Annotated Bibliographies

When keeping track of lots of reading on the same topic, you might want to use an annotated bibliography. Start with the information you would record for any reference list and make notes about key points from that text. This can be very useful to keep track of how ideas have changed and developed and of major studies or researchers. Also consider making notes about your thoughts, ideas and reactions.

Keep track of your sources

Always keep track of where you've found your information; remember to keep a record of details such as author, publisher, date, titles, publishing location, edition, editors, etc.

For more information:

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