

Reading Strategies - Books

Check your course reading list to identify useful books for class and assignments.

1. Identify Purpose

- Identify the purpose of your reading to determine the best reading strategy:
 - Reading for general understanding, such as for tutorial discussion?
 - survey, skim and in-depth
 - Reading for specific information or facts, like an assignment?
 - scan and in-depth
 - Reading for instructions on how to do something?
 - survey, scan and in-depth

2. Reading strategies for academic books

- Think about what you know about the book already. Consider:
 - What is this article about?
 - What do I know about this topic already?
 - What more do I want to know about this topic?
 - Who is the author and what are the author's credentials?
- **Survey**
 - A survey is a quick 'preview' of the book:
 - Read title of the chapters
 - Read the abstract or summary of the book (if it has one – it is usually on the back or inside cover of the book)
 - Read the subtitles or section headings of each chapter (if it has these)
 - If the book has tables, graphs, illustrations and text boxes, read them and their captions
- **Skim**
 - Skim reading is a 'light' reading of the text for just the main points:
 - Read the introduction.
 - Pay close attention to the main arguments set out in the introduction, and the summaries of each chapter.
 - Read the first section of each chapter, which states the author's main argument.
 - Then read the first sentence of each paragraph of the chapter and notice how this argument proceeds throughout the chapter.
 - If you are not sure what the main idea of the paragraph is from the first sentence, read the second sentence as well.
 - Read the conclusion.

- By now, you should know the book's main argument and the main points of each chapter.
- **Scan**
 - Scan read when you are looking for specific information:
 - Make a list of keywords related to the topic you are researching
 - Search through the index (if the book has one) for these keywords
 - Underline or mark the passages containing these keywords
 - Read these passages in-depth
- **In-depth**
 - Read thoroughly, identifying the main idea of each section and each paragraph, and considering the evidence, data, and examples the author uses.
 - Consider, too, whether you agree or disagree with the author and why.
 - Keep your purpose in mind.
 - You can move to the next paragraph (and chapter) when you are confident that you know what the author's main points and main examples are.

3. Note Making (see the [Making Notes](#) handout)

- It is best to make notes after completing this process: survey, skim, then read in-depth
 - After in-depth reading, skim read again while making notes, recording the key points.
 - Record the book's bibliographical information (for a book, you'll need to record author, date, book title, edition, place of publication and publisher; if it is an e-book, note the database in which you found it, or, if it is from a publicly accessible website, the URL address); this is crucial for referencing in assignments.
 - Make notes in your own words (paraphrase), recording page number.
 - If you take passages word-for-word, make sure you put them in "quotation marks" so, for assignments, you will know which words are the author's.

4. Reading tips

- Make time to read.
 - Clear some time (at least an hour) in a quiet, comfortable space.
- Read actively.
 - Think of other ideas and/or examples that back up the author's points.
 - Think of ideas and/or examples that challenge the author's points.
 - It can help to have an imaginary debate with the author.
 - After each paragraph, feel free to stop and think about what the author has written.
- Make a list of questions based on the 5WH words (who, why, where, what, when & how) to focus your reading.
- Read out loud.
 - It is often easier to remember spoken words than words we have seen written on a page.
 - Reading aloud is especially helpful when learning to pronounce difficult words.
- Keep a glossary.
 - Write down unfamiliar words and technical terms in a notebook and check their meaning in a dictionary (especially a specialist dictionary e.g. medical dictionary).
 - Review this glossary weekly to check how your vocabulary is progressing.