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:
     o reading for general understanding, such as for tutorial discussion?
       ➢ survey, skim & in-depth
     o reading for specific information or facts, like an assignment?
       ➢ scan & in-depth
     o reading for instructions on how to do something?
       ➢ survey, scan & in-depth

2. Reading strategies for academic books
   • Before you begin, think about what you know about the book already; consider:
     o what is this book about?
     o what do I know about this topic already?
     o what more do I want to know about this topic?
     o who is the author and what are the author’s credentials?

   a. Survey
      • A survey is a quick ‘preview’ of the book:
        o read title of the chapters.
        o read the abstract or summary of the book (if it has one – it is usually on the back
          or inside cover of the book).
        o read the subtitles or section headings of each chapter (if it has these).
        o if the book has tables, graphs, illustrations and text boxes, read them and their
          captions.

   b. Skim
      • Skim reading is a ‘light’ reading of the text for just the main points:
        o read the introduction.
          ➢ pay close attention to the main arguments set out in the introduction,
            and the summaries of each chapter.
        o 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.
        o read the conclusion.

   • By now, you should know the book’s main argument and the main points of each chapter.
c. 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.

d. 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 (refer to Note-Taking 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 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 a debate with the author.
  - after each paragraph or chapter, 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; eg. medical dictionary).
  - review this glossary weekly to check how your vocabulary is progressing.