

READING

There are many different kinds of reading, each requiring different approaches, techniques and levels of concentration. Some of the different types of reading you may use are listed below.

READING FOR ENJOYMENT — LIGHT READING e.g. magazines, novels, requiring a minimum of effort and little concentration. This differs from study reading in that there is no intention to remember the material.

READING FOR AN OVERVIEW OR EXPLORATORY READING — skimming or pre-reading a book or journal to get a general idea of the topic. This is the sort of reading used when looking through a book before deciding whether or not to take it out of the library to read in greater detail.

REVISION READING — re-reading material with which you are already familiar. Revision reading is used mainly to test information recall.

SEARCH READING — reading to locate specific information or an answer to a particular question. A trivial example of this technique is looking for a phone number in a telephone directory. You are not interested in reading all the names and numbers in the phone book, just one. All the other information is irrelevant and can be ignored.

READING FOR MASTERY — reading to obtain detailed information and an understanding of it; usually slow, careful and repeated reading requiring intense concentration. This may be appropriate when reading directions for laboratory classes, or instructions for working an exam paper. Mathematical and scientific texts almost always require this type of approach. Reading where you are required to progress through specific steps of reasoning, paying particular attention to detail is another example.

CRITICAL READING — reading to assess or review ideas. This also requires intense concentration. Critical reading requires that you distinguish between opinion, assumption and fact, and recognise fallacious or illogical reasoning, false statements, emotional language, understatement, overstatement, irony, satire, omission of information and repetition. It implies approaching the written work with an open mind so that you may be convinced by the author that this point of view is valid, provided you cannot counter with an opposing view based on your own reasoning, logic and beliefs. Critical reading also involves examining the author's competence and credibility, and analysing the material i.e. criticising assumptions, checking logic, examining conclusions and their implications. Comparisons with other authors and points of view should also be made.

PROOF READING — reading to correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, requiring meticulous attention to detail. This is the final step in preparing any written work and should not be forgotten.

An efficient reader will be able to match the appropriate techniques to the different types of reading to be done. To do this your purpose in reading should be clearly established before you start. You must know why you are reading and what it is the reading should achieve. It is also important that you be flexible in your approach and attitude to reading. For instance when reading a newspaper you often need to read between the lines. Reading literature requires an appreciation of the author's mood. Reading social sciences requires that you follow cause and effect relationships and time-space sequences. In disciplines where quantitative problem solving is required you may need to visualise structures, models and procedures as you read.

You should also be flexible with your reading speeds. Some reading needs to be done slowly e.g. when you are reading difficult material or reading to remember information. Sometimes rapid reading is appropriate e.g. when skimming to get an outline or overview of material that does not need to be remembered. Scanning for specific information is another instance where material can

be read rapidly. Revision reading can also be done rapidly if you are very familiar with the material. The speed at which you read should depend largely on the nature and purpose of the reading.

When exploratory reading, sometimes referred to as pre-reading or search reading, it is not necessary that E-V-E-R-Y S-I-N-G-L-E W-O-R-D be read. Phrase reading, key phrase reading and key word reading techniques can be used. This means you focus on the important phrases and words for meaning (usually nouns and verbs) and ignore non-meaning words (especially prepositions). Look for authors' hints to key words e.g. headings, italics and underlining. Diagrams are another way of condensing key information.

Skimming is another rapid reading technique in which you alternately read and float over material looking for main ideas, and clue words such as names, dates, places, how, how much and why. If you can identify a topic sentence (usually the first or last sentence) or topic paragraph read it. Read any summaries or abstracts.

There is a big range in what is considered to be normal reading speeds. If you can effectively adapt different reading strategies to suit yourself and the type of reading you are unlikely to be disadvantaged by being a "slow" reader. There are speed reading courses available but they are time consuming. One way to try to improve your reading speed is to practise for 10 to 15 minutes each day. Begin by reading a newspaper or some other light material. Read as quickly as you can and then test your comprehension by trying to recall as much information as possible. Graduate to more complex study material as your speed increases. If you are unfamiliar with terminology consult a dictionary or technical glossary. While this may slow you down to begin with, you will gain in the long run by gaining familiarity with the subject's language.

SQ3R

One of the frequently advocated techniques of reading is the SQ3R method. While this may be useful for some study reading it is not universally applicable to all categories of reading. There are many variations of the method and they all may be adapted to suit individual requirements.

The five steps of the method are listed below:

S - SURVEY the book/article as a whole. Read the title and any introductory material such as preface/abstract, table of contents, chapter/section headings and conclusions. This procedure should be applied a chapter at a time when reading an entire book i.e. read chapter sub-titles, introductory and concluding paragraphs, summaries and note particularly any figures such as charts, tables or diagrams. When reading a report of an experimental investigation read the section detailing the hypotheses and objectives as this will define the article's central idea.

Q - QUESTION the information being presented and the implications or conclusions that may be drawn. Be alert to the author's purpose in writing the material. Pose questions that you think the text should answer or use questions in the book as an indication of what might be covered. Think about what you are going to read.

R - READ actively (read aloud, underline, but don't browse). Look for main ideas and answers to questions formulated previously. Pose new questions as you read. Don't attempt to make notes on the first reading. Re-read the material a second time to confirm that you have identified the central theme and key issues correctly. You will be able to pay more attention to supporting detail on a second reading. Make notes or summaries during the second reading.

R - RECALL. This is to test how much of the material just read is memorised and is a well established aid to learning. Without making a conscious effort to recall most people forget about half of what they have just read within seconds of putting down a book. After two weeks as little as 10% may be remembered.

As soon as you have finished your reading you should test your grasp of the information by listing key points or writing in your own words an outline of the information. Recall should be done section by section or a chapter at a time when reading a book.

R - REVIEW by repeating the above steps. Survey the general structure. Remind yourself of the questions raised. Are there any new or unanswered questions? Re-read the text, checking that you have remembered all the important ideas. Test your recall of these important ideas. Check that your recall is accurate.

Ideally reviews should be done immediately after the first reading, just before the final examination and several times in between.

As you can see if this method was rigorously applied to all reading it would severely limit the amount of reading we could do. It may be appropriate for some of your reading, but be prepared to adapt or use only one or two steps where this is appropriate. For instance when you are reading for an overview, surveying and a first reading may be sufficient. Give the SQ3R method a go and see what you think of it. It is a good start to evaluating your own reading skills or lack thereof. It may also be a good base on which to build and develop your own individual reading styles.

For all university students time is limited! Use your reading skills and techniques to read selectively, efficiently and effectively.

HAPPY READING!

IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION ON STUDY SKILLS OR WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS THESE FURTHER SEE THE ACADEMIC SKILLS COUNSELLORS.