

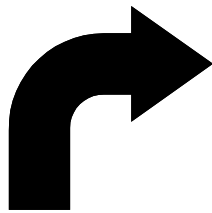
Reading and Understanding Texts

Choose a section not longer than 25-30 pages—perhaps one chapter or a section of a chapter—that you can handle at one sitting. Follow the following steps:

- Step 1 Read the title, the introduction, and the conclusion (5 minutes)
- Step 2 Read the title, the introduction again, all sub-headings, and the conclusion, again (5-10 minutes)
- Step 3 Read the title, the introduction, sub-headings, the topic sentence of each paragraph (usually the first or second sentence), any italicized or boldfaced words, lists (you can skim these), and the conclusion (10 minutes)

FORCE YOURSELF TO DO STEPS 1 TO 3 IN LESS THAN 25 MINUTES!

- Step 4 Close your textbook
- Step 5 Review from memory. Write down everything you can remember, without looking back at the text. If you can't remember at least 80% of the key points you have covered, you read too much before reviewing. If you come to a dead end, try alternative memory techniques to the ones you have been using: associating ideas, either from within the section itself or from other related material; visualizing pages, pictures, graphs, etc.; recalling personal associations that may have come to mind; staring out the window and blanking out your thoughts, etc. This is strenuous but rewarding—it will show you exactly how much you have learned of what you have read.
- Step 6 Check through the text and fill in any important information that you missed. Use a different color of ink or some other way to mark this material so you can study it later. Repeat the above steps as many times as necessary, going for greater detail each time. Stop when you can recall the key points.



Tips for Increasing Reading Speed

As our eyes move across the page they make a series of jerky movements. Whenever they come to rest on a word that is called a *fixation*. Most people fixate once on each word across a line of print. In order to increase reading speed, you must take in more words with each fixation.

- 1) Try to avoid focusing on every word, but rather look at groups of 2 to 3 words. For instance, this sentence could be grouped in this manner:
for instance/ this sentence/ could be grouped/ in this manner
- 2) Work on vocabulary improvement. Familiarize yourself with new words so you don't get stuck on them when reading them again.
- 3) If you find yourself moving your lips when reading, force yourself to read faster by following #1 above.
- 4) Read more. 15 minutes a day of reading an average size novel equals 18 books a year at an average reading speed.
- 5) Determine your purpose before reading. If you only need main ideas, then allow yourself to skim the material. Don't feel you must read every word.
- 6) Spend a few minutes a day reading at a faster than comfortable rate (about 2 to 3 times faster than your normal speed). Use your hand or an index card to guide your eyes down the page. Then time yourself reading a few pages at your normal speed. You will often find that your normal reading speed will increase after your skimming practice.
- 7) If you have poor concentration when reading, practice reading for only 5—10 minutes at a time and gradually increase this time.
- 8) There are several books on increasing reading speed available in most bookstores. If you are serious about increasing your rate you may want to work systematically through one of these books.

Developed by the
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Wallace State Community College—Hanceville

Effective Reading Strategies



Reading Strategies

ACTIVE READING—Active reading helps to keep your mind focused on the material and stops it from wandering. When you are reading it is often useful to highlight, underline and annotate the text as you go. This emphasizes information in your mind, and helps you to review important points after you have finished reading the text. This is obviously something to do if you own the document! If you find that active reading helps significantly, then it may be worth photocopying the information.

KNOWING WHAT YOU WANT TO KNOW—The most important thing to know is the goal of your study: what do you want to know after reading the text? An easy way to do this is to look at the introduction and the chapter headings. The introductions should let you know who the target audience is and what the book seeks to achieve. The chapter headings will show an overall view of the structure of the subject. While you are looking at the text, ask yourself if it is targeted at you, or assumes too much or too little knowledge. Would other material meet your needs more closely?

KNOWING HOW DEEPLY TO STUDY THE MATERIAL - Where you only need the shallowest knowledge of the subject, you can *skim* the material. Here you read only chapter headings, introductions and summaries. If you need a moderate level of information on a subject, then you can *scan* the text. Here you read the chapter introductions and summaries in detail, and may speed-read the contents of the chapters, picking out and understanding key words and concepts. At this level of looking at the document it is worth paying attention to diagrams and graphs. Only when you need detailed knowledge of a subject is it worth *studying* the text. Here it is best to skim the material first to get an overview of the subject. Once you have done this you can read it in detail while seeing how the information presented relates to the overall structure of the subject.

READING TECHNICAL INFORMATION- Technical information is typically less friendly than other information. It is often complex and assumes a high level of initial knowledge. Before wading into technical documentation, assess who it has been written for—is it too basic to meet your needs, or is it so advanced that you cannot understand it? If referring to specific information, it is most effective to use the table of contents and index to find the appropriate section. If you are reading large amounts of the material, it may be effective to photocopy the glossary, and keep this beside you. It will probably be useful to note the key concepts in your own words and refer to them when necessary.

READING MAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS

The most effective way of dealing with magazines is to scan their contents tables or indexes, turning directly to interesting articles. If the articles are useful cut them out and file them in a folder for that subject matter. Newspapers tend to be arranged in sections so you must find the section that contains the subject matter desired. Articles within newspapers and magazines tend to be in three main types:

**News Articles*—here the most important information is presented first, with information being less and less significant as the article progresses. News articles are designed to explain the key points first, and then flesh them out with detail.

**Opinion Articles*—these articles are designed to advance a viewpoint. Here the most important information is contained in the introduction and the summary, with the middle of the article containing supporting arguments.

**Feature Articles*- these are written to provide entertainment or background on a subject. Typically the most important information is in the body of the text.

How to Read and Analyze Essays

- 1) Take a pencil in your hand
 - 2) Read the essay over once, quickly, looking for the main idea, for what the essay is about in general, and for what the author seems to be saying. Don't get bogged down in details. If you come to an unfamiliar word, circle it but go on reading.
 - 3) Check the meaning of unfamiliar words. If they seem to be key words (if the author uses them more than once) scribble a brief definition at the bottom of the page or at the end of the essay.
 - 4) Now re-read more slowly and carefully, this time making a conscious attempt to begin to isolate the single most important generalization the author makes (his thesis). Follow his line of thought and determine what is the main point the author is making. Remember, examples or "for instances" are not main points. The thesis is the generalization the author is attempting to prove valid. Your job is to ask yourself, "What is the author trying to prove?"
- 8) If the author has stated his thesis fully and clearly and all in one place then your job is easier. The thesis is apt to be stated somewhere in the last few paragraphs, in which case the preceding paragraphs gradually lead up to it. It may also be somewhere right after the introduction, in which case the balance of the essay justifies the statement and refers back to it. Sometimes, however, the author never states the entire thesis in so many words; he gives it to you a piece at a time.
 - 5) When you think you have grasped the main point, underline it and write "thesis" in the margin. If you find you have several possible theses, don't panic—they all fit together somehow. One or more will probably turn out to be supporting the thesis rather than part of it.
 - 6) Now re-read for structure. You are looking for the main divisions of the essay. There will probably be an introduction: draw a line across the page after the introduction and write it in the margin. Now tackle the body of the essay. What are the main points the author makes in leading up to his thesis or justifying it? You will find in longer essays that you are dealing with groups of paragraphs, all having to do with the same subdivision of the main subject. Draw lines between the main groups and give the groups labels. For example, in an essay about how to take an English final, you would probably find groups of paragraphs all of which could be labeled "preparation", and another group that could be called "exam questions". Under each group there would be sub-groups: under "preparation" there might be "reviewing essay", "memorizing terminology", etc.
 - 7) In each subdivision find out what points the author is making. In the above example about the English final, find out specifically what the author says to do in order to prepare for the exam. In other words, identify the topic sentence of each important paragraph. Underline the sentence. Sometimes the topic sentence is at the beginning of the paragraph and sometimes at the end. Sometime the topic is not stated but is only implied.
 - 8) You now have the skeleton of the author's argument and should be able to follow his reasoning. Consider the following questions: what was his guiding purpose? Why did he write this and for whom? What assumptions did he make (what did he take for granted his audience already knew, or already believed, or both)? Is his audience hostile or friendly?