

Reading Comprehension Tips

Do you ever feel overwhelmed with the amount of reading you have? Do you ever have trouble staying focused and motivated while reading? Do you sometimes have difficulty understanding and remembering what you read? If so, you're not alone. Many students struggle with these things because reading in college can be challenging and time-consuming; however, with some effective strategies, you can make your reading time meaningful, focused, and productive.

ACTIVE READING

Research shows that you retain more when you actively engage and interact with texts, as opposed to simply reading and re-reading without a clear purpose. Many students can relate to the type of reading that involves copying down pages of notes word-for-word from the text or simply scanning over pages without really reading them or interacting at all. While these two approaches are on opposite ends of the spectrum, neither of them engages your brain in a way that elicits deep understanding and retention. Active reading engages your brain in effective strategies that force your brain to interact with the text before, during, and after reading and that help you better gauge what you are (and aren't) learning.

BEFORE YOU READ

1. KNOW YOUR PURPOSE

Yes, you're reading because your professor told you to do so, but there is more to it than that. What will you be asked to do with the information you gather from your reading assignment? Reading in preparation for a multiple-choice exam requires a greater attention to detail (think keywords, definitions, dates and specific concepts and examples) than reading to prepare for discussion or to write an essay (think main points and relationships). Consider your purpose for reading and what you need to be able to understand, know, or do after reading. Keep this purpose in mind as you read.

2. INTEGRATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

You already know so much; why not help yourself out? Before previewing the text, determine what you already know about the material you are to read. Think about how the reading relates to other course topics, and ask why your professor might have assigned the text. Identify personal experiences or second-hand knowledge that relates to the topic. Make a list of things you want to know about the text or questions that you want to try to answer while reading.



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3. PREVIEW THE TEXT

Don't jump in all at once. Give the text an initial glance, noting headings, diagrams, tables, pictures, bolded words, summaries, and key questions. Consider reading introductions and conclusions to gather main ideas. After you preview, predict what the section or chapter will be about and what the main concepts are going to be.

4. PLAN TO BREAK YOUR READING INTO MANAGEABLE CHUNKS

Do you have five days to read twenty pages? Read four pages a night. Twenty pages in only one night? Read four pages and then take a fifteen-minute break to rest your mind and move your body. Taking breaks while reading improves focus, motivation, understanding, and retention. Plus, it's healthier for our bodies! Try using a weekly calendar or the Pomodoro Technique to break up and schedule your time.

5. DECIDE WHETHER AND HOW TO READ FROM A SCREEN

Especially if you are taking courses online or studying remotely, some of your course materials may be in a digital format, such as online journal articles or electronic textbooks. Before you read, decide if your reading is something you could and would want to print out. Sometimes it is easier to grasp content when it is on paper. If this is not your preference or is not an option, make reading breaks an even higher priority, consider adjusting your screen, and be strategic about the time of day when you are reading in order to avoid eye strain or headaches.

WHILE READING

1. SELF-MONITOR

The only one who can make sure you're engaged while reading is you! If you are able to think about what you will eat for dinner or what will happen next on that Netflix show you love, you are no longer paying attention! As soon as you notice your mind drifting, STOP and consider your needs. Do you need a break? Do you need a more active way to engage with the text? Do you need background noise or movement? Do you need to hear the text aloud? What about a change of environment? Before resuming, summarize the last chunk of text you remember to make sure that you know the appropriate starting point.

2. ANNOTATE

Overusing the highlighter? Put it down and try annotation. Develop a key/system to note the following in the text: key ideas/major points, unfamiliar words/unclear information, key words and phrases, important information, and connections.



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3. SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW

- Create an outline of the text from memory, starting with the main points and working toward details, leaving gaps when necessary to go back to the text for facts or other things you can't remember.
- Discuss the material with a friend or classmate.
- Call a family member and teach them what you now know.
- Brain dump: write down everything you remember from the reading in 5 minutes.
- Ask yourself critical questions about the reading and answer those questions in a timed format.
- Identify the important concepts from the reading and provide examples and non-examples of each concept.
- Create a concept map from memory to illustrate your learning from the assigned reading.
- Take screenshots from digital texts as a starting point for class notes or annotations.

4. INVESTIGATE FURTHER

If any information remains unclear, locate other resources related to the topic such as a trusted video source or web-based study guide. Still have questions you can't answer on your own? Make note of them to ask a professor, TA, or classmate.

5. SELF-TEST

- Create flashcards or an outline for the main concepts, terms, dates, etc. in the text.
- Use the flashcards or outline to test yourself on what you read and see how much you remember and can explain correctly.
- Cover the answers or explanations and don't look at them until after you have already answered or explained in your own words.
- Pause videos periodically and use your own knowledge to supply an answer or predict where the video is going. Then hit play to see if you are on track.
- Self-testing in this way will help you synthesize and think through the information and recall it better in the future.

