Reading Strategies

Depending on your learning style preferences, many of the following suggestions are worth considering and implementing:

- Read early in the day to avoid fatigue.
- Read in short bursts of time, 40-45 minutes, and then take a short break.
- Read in a quiet location and be consistent in that location.
- Avoid moving your lips while you are reading, and avoid reading out loud. You can read two times faster than you can speak. Exception: some people with difficulty remembering what they have just read find their retention may improve when they move their lips while reading.
- Read material at a 90-degree angle and at eye level to avoid neck and shoulder strain.
- Read, read, and read as often as possible to increase your vocabulary and exercise your eye muscles.
- Pace your reading using a finger, pen, pencil or ruler.
- Avoid reading every word. To increase the speed of your reading, try focusing on the first and last sentences of the paragraphs, use chapter headings as guides to identify main ideas, and create a study guide or outline. Use a simple question and answer study guide for text reading (who, what, where, why, how, when). Depending on the reading material, many details are unnecessary.
- Teach others what you have read; this reinforces your learning and retention of information.
- Obtain an overview of the reading assignment in order to see the whole; pre-read the introduction, headings, and summary. Many on-line textbook companion websites (provided by the textbook publisher) offer chapter overviews, practice tests, flash cards, etc.

Make every time you read an active study session with the PQ4R Method.
Adapting PQ4R to anthologies, essays, or fiction

With reading that has longer chapters and is not as fact-dense as textbooks, you can adapt the PQ4R method to help you keep track of trends or themes in the reading as well as details. Be familiar with the class syllabus and assignments for presentations or papers at the beginning of the semester, so you are reading with a purpose from day one.

Skim the chapter or article you will be reading during your study session. Try to break the chapter down into topical sections and write yourself a study question for the first section before you begin to read. At the end of the section, or at a natural break after a few pages, go back and write summary statements at the bottom of the pages to help you retain the author’s content. Reflect on the content and add comments to the summary statements if you wish. Keep small post-it notes or stick-on page tabs handy, and when you encounter a passage or statement that you would like to remember or use in a paper, highlight the passage and use a tab to mark the page. Put a cue word on the tab so you can find the quote later. Then move on to the next section and repeat the process.

When you end your study session, or when you complete a chapter or article, go back and review the contents by answering your study questions and reviewing your summary statements, as well as any highlighted or tabbed passages.

When you pick up your reading at the next study session, begin with a review of the previous chapter’s study questions and summary statements. Checking the class syllabus as well as the book’s table of contents will provide you with important understandings about how the reading connects to your lectures and help you remember details.

Adapting PQ4R to journal articles

While journal articles are short, they are dense and often contain content that you are asked to evaluate, unlike textbooks. The pre-view process is not connected to a lecture, but is still essential. When you preview, notice the author(s) of the article (there are often footnotes at the bottom of the first page or the end of the article providing information about the authors); read any abstract or summary provided at the beginning of the article; notice the date of the article and source (who published it); and finally skim the headings for sections.

Before you read each section, write questions to guide your study in the margins. Most journal articles provide answers to the following questions: what is the history of this problem? Why is it an important problem? How did the author study the problem (what did he or she do?). What data came out of the study? What conclusions does the author make? What next steps, if any, does he or she propose? Reflect on each section of the research report as you complete reading, writing comments in the margin if you wish.

When you are finished with the article, review it by writing answers in the margin under each question so that you have an outline of the study. You should highlight and if necessary tab significant findings that you will use in term papers or class discussions.

Practices which are usually not productive for students:

• Using highlighters to mark important passages as you read (it’s all important!)
• Failing behind the syllabus in your reading
• Reading while listening to music with lyrics
• Writing outlines of all the important information in each chapter
• Rewriting or typing class notes

Practices that work for many students:

• Reading in 50 minute blocks, followed by a ten minute break
• Reciting or reviewing material while talking out loud or moving your lips (have your learning style analyzed to find out if this is a good technique for you).
• Using study time to self-test rather than rereading the entire text (targeted rereading of material you have forgotten is helpful).
• Joining a study group to discuss the reading.
• Getting regular exercise, which makes sitting for long periods easier