

Reading for a Purpose

General Advice

Reading is not a passive experience; we must engage with the reading, sometimes in a tactile way (with a pencil, a highlighter, or a dramatic reading). Each assignment requires a different level of focus and a unique kind of attention. Establish a goal for the reading experience. As a student, you should ask, "What do I want to get out of the assignment and what does the instructor want me to get out of the assignment?"

Reading to Prepare for Discussion / Reading for Ideas

1. Pre-read: become familiar with the text, its components, and its style.
2. Highlight passages that seem important.
3. Take notes in the margins.
4. Make connections between sections and ideas; look for repetitions or ideas/language that are explored more than once.
5. Write a personal response or summary at the end of important sections/chapters.
6. Respond in (semi-formal) writing to the reading.
7. Talk with others about the reading.
8. Read what others have written about the reading.

Reading for Specific Knowledge

1. Pre-read: become familiar with the text, its components, and its style.
2. Listen to what the professor wants and be attentive to specific directions.
3. Notice patterns in what kinds and types of information the instructor thinks are important.
4. Skim the reading and then read important sections more thoroughly.
5. Notice what the text emphasizes (category headings, italics, side-notes).
6. Take notes in the margin of the text.
7. Indicate significant passages—underline, sticky notes, commentary, check mark, highlighter.
8. At the conclusion of a section or chapter, write a summary of what you thought was most important.
9. Close the book and write out the ten most important things you just read.
10. Form and attend a study group to talk about your reading.

Reading to Write a Summary or Short Response

1. Pre-read: become familiar with the text, its components, and its style.
2. Mark controversial passages you may want to challenge.
3. Determine what you think is the text's primary purpose or objective.
4. Mark passages or material you can use to support your position or argument.
5. Select what you consider to be the most important passages; build your response (or argument) around these passages.

Reading to Write a Longer Essay

1. Pre-read: become familiar with the text, its components, and its style.
2. Mark passages that are interesting, beautiful, challenging, difficult, or otherwise engaging.
3. Outline sections as you read, categorizing chunks of text.
4. Take notes in the margins that will allow you to return to material you may need later.
5. Summarize significant sections and passages.
6. Write out connections to other texts, larger ideas, and/or reasons certain passages, chapters, or information could be useful.

Reading to Prepare for an Exam

1. Pre-read: become familiar with the text, its components, and its style.
2. Be attentive to what the professor indicates is important.
3. Skim the text and then read important sections more thoroughly.
4. Return to the text and skim sections you marked, notes you took.
5. Mark significant information; rewrite information on index cards or in notes.
6. Write out anticipated questions, imagine the test environment and read as if answering test questions.
7. Form and attend a study group to talk about your reading.

Navigating the Forest of Long, Technical, and Complex Texts

A Path up the Mountain

(P)rofessor First!

(A)ttack the Text with Pre-Reading!

(T)ransform the Reading Environment!

(H)elp yourself with Recall: Annotate!

1. **Ask your professor the right questions:**
 - a. How would you like me to read this text?
 - b. What will I be expected to do with the reading?
 - c. What questions might you ask us?
 - d. Are there parts that need more attention or careful study?
 - e. Is there any background or context that would facilitate my reading?

2. **Strategies for Pre-Reading a Text—what to consider as you hover:**
 - a. Introductions, Abstracts, Summaries.
 - b. **Bold, Italicized, or Shaded Sentences and Areas.**
 - c. Pictures, Charts, and Diagrams.
 - d. Study Questions or Directed Reading Prompts.
 - e. Bibliographies, End Notes, Author's Notes.

3. **Steps for Successful Reading:**
 - a. Control the Physical Environment:
 - i. Turn off Facebook, ipod, cell phone, friends, and roommates.
 - ii. Dedicate time to read; reward yourself for planning.
 - b. Hover / Gather: introductory or summary sections, italicized or bold language, first sentences and paragraphs, section headings, pictures and graphs.
 - c. Use physical tools to read: pencil, paper, finger.
 - d. Control the pace of your reading—sections have different importance.

4. **Tools for Annotating:**
 - a. Read with a pencil or pen; leave the highlighter behind.
 - b. Create a system: check mark = "pay attention," asterisk = "return," etc.
 - c. Underline key passages.
 - d. Take notes in the margins: respond to the text, write out your thoughts, indicate connections to other parts of the text, generate reminders, etc.
 - e. Summarize important passages, sections, or chapters: what should you remember?