

Strategies for Effective Reading

Adapted from Dr. Kathleen King's Reading Strategies, for use by Oregon State's Academic Success Center

- Sit up to read, ideally at a desk or table, and be sure you have access to good light.
- Pay attention to how background noise affects you. If you find yourself distracted by it, find a place where you can keep it to a minimum. Reduce music, or know what works as ambient noise. Try to find a place where there aren't people talking distinctly, or kids playing nearby, or any TV/radio/podcasts/etc. The least distracting environment will help you focus your concentration on the text.
- Be prepared to take notes; if you're taking notes electronically, shut down all your other browsers and turn of any notifications to reduce those distractions.
- Before you dive in, consider the purpose of the reading. Why was it assigned? How does it relate to what you're learning about in class? What might you take away from it? Record your thoughts.
- Do a brief survey of textual cues: title, subheadings, bold print, callouts. What stands out? Are there illustrations or graphs? What can you learn from each of these details?
- Consider breaking the reading up strategically: read the intro and conclusion before anything else, then read it all, or read all the first lines to get a feel for how the information/argument/critique progresses, and then go ahead and read it all from the beginning.
- Scan it all, find what interests you most or what seems the most relevant, and focus your time there and really dig into that content and those details.
- Make intentional time (it doesn't have to be long, even just a minute) to learn about how you read and also the type of readings being assigned. Take note of when it works to skim and when it's important to take your time and understand all of it.
- Be an active participant in the reading process. Write down questions you have, annotate in the margins, engage in a discussion with the text (aloud or on paper/screen). Try to explain concepts aloud, think about what might be asked on a test, pay attention to what you like and what you're not interested in and explore why each of those is.
- If you get stuck, use it to your advantage; tamp down any negative self-talk or internal dialogue and use it as an opportunity to learn: free-write about where you got stuck, why you think it was difficult, what you might do to move forward, etc.
- If you get confused, dig into the experience. Take note what/why, ask questions about what happened. Confusion is a part of the process of learning to understand—it's important!
- When things get difficult and you're having trouble understanding, slow down. Re-read sections and annotate/question/critique. Try to explain content to someone else, or have someone else read the section and then talk through it together. Seek others to work with!

King, K. (n.d.). Reading strategies. Retrieved from https://www.ghc.edu/sites/default/files/StudentResources/documents/learningcenter/handouts/Reading/reading_strategies.htm

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- Break it up. Long assignments can feel overwhelming, and overwhelm can get in the way of motivation and focus. Instead of sitting down to read 50 pages, commit to reading 10 pages and taking notes, and then give yourself a break with something else. Later, read the next 10 pages; each time you start a new section, try to summarize what you've read about up to that point.
- Don't skip the prefaces and summaries! Reading these can reveal details—about the research, about the author's intent, about the process, etc. In addition, reference the table of contents to get a feel for the structure and movement of ideas. If you're reading about specific names, places or ideas, or you know you need to find these in the text in particular, don't forget about the index at the end of the book.
- Put things into your own words—this might be happening in your notes, as you answer end-of-chapter questions, in conversations with others, as you're walking the dog or feeding the fish or heading out for a hike. It can be especially helpful when you run into difficult text; try to translate the official terminology into language that anyone could understand.
- Be sure you get your questions answered. Bring them to office hours and have a conversation with your instructor. Take them into a study group and see what others took away from the assignment. Visit with a TA/GTA and let them know where you're confused, what you're thinking, and what questions you still have. But whatever it is, if you don't reach a place of understanding, ASK.
- Look up additional readings/content on the topic. How do the different authors approach the content, and does reading someone else help you to clarify or build on what you've already learned?
- Take the opportunity to create a counter-argument—you don't have to disagree with what you've read in order to do this, but engaging in this kind of thinking can help you find where you might still need additional thinking/reading, or provide a new angle on the rhetorical choices the author made, etc. If you'll ultimately be asked to write about the topic yourself, spending time thinking like this and practicing will be extremely helpful as you go to craft an argument/critique/explanation/etc.
- Turn your notes into study materials. This might mean that you combine different sets of notes, or turn your different chapter notes into a concept map, or something else. But make use of your notes by transforming them into tools that will test and reinforce your learning and your ability to retrieve what you've read and apply it.
- Take breaks. Reading is hard work. Forcing yourself to keep going when it's not working might not be as effective as walking away, choosing to sleep and wake up early the next day, using one of the earlier strategies to get a better feel for what it is you're reading about, etc. Breaks are important for your brain!

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READING SUGGESTIONS

FUN-DAMENTALS