

## Active Reading

Reading is a very important skill to ensure success at college. The reading load of a college student can be quite a dramatic change from the reading demands in secondary school. A good reader is an active reader with clear goals in mind from the outset i.e., ask questions about what you need to find out, taking a strategic and critical approach, then selecting readings that relate to your questions and tasks. Time is limited so it is important to be selective with what you read.

Reading actively promotes understanding, increases attention and concentration, and improves retention. Strategic reading can be taught to students who require it through carefully devised instructional techniques! (*Paris & Winograd, 1990*). There are a variety of reading strategies available to students. Your purpose for reading should determine which strategy or strategies to use.

### Purpose of Reading

- Always have a purpose before reading. The purpose could be:
  - To gain an overview of a topic
  - To establish a greater understanding of a topic or idea
  - To locate specific information
  - Gather supporting evidence for an assignment
  - Prepare for exams
  - Critique or evaluate

### Before Reading

Before reading any material, it is important to **activate prior knowledge** about a topic. This will enable you to read more effectively and efficiently. Ask yourself, what do you already know about the subject and always read with questions in mind as this will aid understanding and retention.

It is as important that you are also **mentally prepared** before reading:

- **A positive attitude** is crucial for effective reading. Know your goals and be realistic.
- **Concentration**: be prepared as every time you stop, it breaks your concentration
- **Memory**: understanding is key to remembering. Try to look at the topic as a whole.

The SQ3R Method is one approach that can be used to help students read actively. See figure below.

Survey	Question	Read	Recite	Review
<p><b>Before reading</b> <b>Survey</b></p> <p>Look through the whole reading to preview it. Approach it by scanning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• title(s) and subheadings</li> <li>• summaries or abstracts</li> <li>• the introduction and conclusion</li> <li>• visual materials (pictures, charts, graphs, or tables) and their captions</li> <li>• the first and last sentences in paragraphs</li> <li>• the conclusion</li> <li>• any focus questions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Question while you survey</b></p> <p>As you are surveying, note down your questions. This keeps you alert and focused on your work.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask yourself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is this chapter/article about?</li> <li>• What did my lecturer/tutor say about this chapter or subject?</li> <li>• What do I already know about this subject?</li> <li>• How does this reading relate to what I already know/have read?</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Devise questions that will guide your reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think of specific questions that you need to, or would like to, find answers for.</li> <li>• Read any focus questions at the end of the reading.</li> <li>• Turn the title, headings, and subheadings into questions. For example, if the heading is Qualitative and Quantitative Research, your question might be: 'What is the difference between these?'</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Make a list of questions for consideration. You will use them for revision to help you remember.</li> </ol>	<p><b>When you begin to Read look for answers to your questions</b></p> <p>First, read without making notes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Decrease your pace and read actively. Take your time and find a quiet place where you can concentrate.</li> <li>2. As you read, look for answers to the questions you noted down earlier.</li> <li>3. Question the author's reasoning. Is each point justified? Is there evidence? What is the evidence?</li> <li>4. Compare diagrams and illustrations with the written text. You may understand them more.</li> <li>5. Make sure you understand what you are reading. Reduce your reading speed for difficult passages. Stop and reread parts which are not clear.</li> <li>6. If you have difficulty understanding, look up difficult words in a dictionary or glossary and reread. If the meaning of a word or passage still evades you, leave it and read on. Perhaps after more reading you will find it more accessible and the meaning will become clear. Speak to your tutor if your difficulty continues.</li> <li>7. Use reflection to increase your understanding of what you read. When the author makes a claim, reflect on your prior knowledge to support, or disprove it. If this raises more questions, note them down. This will help you remember and understand. Keep in mind - personal reflection only as a learning tool and is insufficient to prove or refute a research finding.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Recite after you've read a section:</b></p> <p>Have an outline of the reading in note form.</p> <p>Try to recall and write your thinking about what you have read.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Close the book and cover your notes.</li> <li>2. Make notes of what you remember about the main thesis and points of the reading.</li> <li>3. Check their accuracy against the notes you made during your reading.</li> <li>4. Return to the reading. Read one section at a time and try to recall what you have read. If you were unable to recall one of the major points, then reread that section to clarify it.</li> <li>5. It can also be helpful to RECITE aloud. Sum up the main points verbally in your own words.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Review: an ongoing process</b></p> <p>At the end of your study period:</p> <p>Check the accuracy of your notes against the original material (if you underlined the main points this will be easier). This is an important part of the process as it can help you clarify and remember what you have read.</p> <p>The next day:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Read through your notes to reacquaint yourself with the main thesis and key points.</li> <li>2. Read through the questions you noted down and try to answer them from memory.</li> <li>3. Try doing the same thing after a few days. If you are reading for a course, periodically reviewing notes will help you at exam time. The more you revise throughout semester, the less you will need to cram during exam study periods.</li> </ol>

