A Guide On How To:

Read Difficult Material

• Before reading
• During reading
• After reading
Reading Difficult Material

Technical fields require you to understand Point A before you can understand Point B, so misunderstanding tough reading can have severe consequences.

**Set yourself up to succeed.**
- Read any section of the textbook for five minutes. Read slow enough so that you can fully understand what you are reading.
- Estimate how much time you will need to read the assignment by calculating the time needed using the amount you were able to read in five minutes.

  2 pages = 5 minutes; 20 pages = 50 minutes
- Set a purpose or reason for reading by forming questions from the bolded words.
- Know your learning style and find out a variety of ways to help you remember what you’ve read. For example, students who learn best by hearing may need to discuss a difficult reading with another student, tutor, or instructor.

Preview the **organizational structure** of the reading to help you plan your time.
- Introduction and Summary
- Photographs, graphics and captions
- Major sections and sub-sections
- End of chapter questions

**Think about what you might already know about the topic.** This will help you relate, store, and use the new information in the text.
### While You Read

**Paraphrase after each paragraph or section.**
- Read **one paragraph or section** in the textbook chapter and ask yourself, “What do I need to remember?” Write the answer on a sticky note or in the margins.
- Use **your own words** to find what the text means specifically to you, and to put it into language that’s comfortable for you.
- Write a **question** to read to an instructor for any idea you do not understand. Include the page number and paragraph as a text reference.

**Be active** with the text.
- Read first, then **go back and highlight** the main idea, ideas you can connect to, or points you can use.
- **Mark in the text anytime you react to it.** Designate symbols like a question mark for when you are confused or a star for material you do understand to use in the margins.
- Write **one-word main ideas** of each paragraph in the margins

**Keep the big picture in mind,** and don’t get stuck on the details.
- Ask yourself: **What is the most important idea in this section?** Write that idea at the top of your article, or highlight it in your textbook.
- Use your one-word main ideas after each section to think about the big picture.
- **Refer to your class notes, textbook, highlighting, and online resources** for support anytime you recognize an idea or a concept sounds familiar.
After You’ve Read

**Take as much time as you need to understand the material**; don’t get discouraged if you don’t understand it right away.

- Use the **material at the end** of a textbook section or chapter to find out what you need to review.
- In a research article, read the **abstract** and the **summary sections** to compare your notes and highlighting from your first reading.
- Re-read the material, but be sure to **give yourself a break** between readings.

**Relate** what you just read to what you already know to connect the new information.

- Review your syllabus, class notes, online resources, or the table of contents in your textbook to find out how your topic is related to the rest of the course.
- Designate a highlighting color or symbol to stand for an idea that appears in your text, notes, or other research articles.

**Check for understanding.**

- Use your own words to **paraphrase** the text, or **create a self-test or a graphic organizer** out of your notes. Difficult ideas are more understandable in familiar language.
- Bring the text to a tutor or an instructor, and **discuss the material with them**. Refer to your margin notes in the text, and be prepared to add to them as you discuss.

**References**


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