

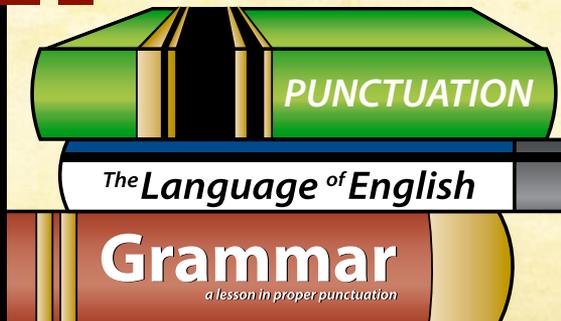
The **WRITING** CENTER

**Elftmann Student
Success Center**

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.

Before You Read

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.

$2 \text{ pages} = 5 \text{ minutes}; 20 \text{ pages} = 50 \text{ minutes}$

- 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.

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.



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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- McWhorter, Kathleen. (2010). College Reading and Study Skills. 11th. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

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