

# Reading Effectively and Efficiently

Studying at university requires you to read for lectures and tutorials, to research for assignments and to study for exams. You read to grasp concepts, understand applications and form views or positions on an issue or topic. It is sometimes difficult to stay in control of the volume or fully understand the complexity of some of the content. These strategies will assist you to improve your reading efficiency and effectiveness.

**Know your purpose** – this will determine your reading strategy.

- **Skimming** is where you do not read every word. Instead you focus on the contents page, headings and sub headings, the abstract or introductory paragraph and the conclusion. You may also note any diagrams or graphics of interest. This technique will help you make decisions about the suitability of research materials. Skimming should be used for all types of reading at university as having a brief overview prior to reading in full helps with comprehension.
- **Scanning** is used when you are reading to find specific material or data related to an assignment topic or to find the answers for questions e.g. for tutorial activities.
- **Detailed reading** is where you focus on the written material to gather specific facts or information, views or positions on a topic.
- **Critical reading** requires you to actively engage with the written material and question and evaluate the quality and relevance of the information for your task. This may include analysing the author's strategies, methods and reasoning. Critical reading is a vital skill to develop. It will help you become a better analytical thinker which is a necessary process to demonstrate in your academic writing.

**Minimise distractions** (both physical and cognitive)

- Have an organised place to study. Avoid reading in bed as your brain will associate this with relaxation. Turn off or remove distractions.
- Try to monitor your thinking while you are studying to minimise loss of concentration. This involves self-questioning. Do I understand this? Am I paying attention? Try to connect what you are reading with what you already know.

**Break reading time into manageable sections and set short term goals and rewards.**

- Plan for reading time in your weekly schedule and always have a goal before you start to read.
- Do not spend any longer than 50 minutes reading without a break. If you lose concentration sooner, take a break.
- Always review and evaluate your progress against your plan and adjust if necessary.

**Use active strategies to help focus and concentrate**

- Highlight or underline key ideas/ concepts.
- Make margin notes or use post-it notes to make your own comments on the relevance of these ideas/concepts to your task or to link to other authors or concepts.
- Improve your concentration by turning headings and subheadings into questions and then scan the text for the answers. This will improve your reading speed and focus.
- Take notes or create concept maps to plan and connect ideas/concepts from your readings.

## Use a dictionary or glossary

- It is likely that your readings will contain terminology that is unfamiliar. If you are reading a textbook there may be a glossary of terms you could use. If not check a dictionary to stay engaged and better understand what you are reading.

## Think critically

In critical reading you must scrutinize the reading text in detail and adopt a questioning approach. The following are some questions to consider as part of this process.

- Are there any contradictions?
- Is there an argument developed? Is it logical?
- Is the text biased?
- Is there an alternative conclusion to one given?
- What supporting evidence is given and how valid is that evidence?
- Are there any 'hidden' assumptions?
- What alternative perspectives are available in the wider literature?

## Structure

Identifying overall structure in your reading can help comprehension, retention and recall. Look for pattern in the text, i.e. is it comparing ideas, discussing causes and effects or problems and solutions. Transition or signal words and phrases help identify structure. They act as signposts when reading. Use these words in your writing to create structure and improve writing flow.

Transition Words and Phrases					
For continuing an idea	For providing a contrasting view	For showing cause and effect	For showing sequence	For concluding	For restating a point or giving examples
Additionally... In addition... Moreover... Because Consequently... Clearly, then... Furthermore... In the same way... Continuing this idea... Also... Pursuing this further...	In contrast to Unlike the previous example... Different from this... Despite these findings... However... Contrary to these findings... In opposition to... Nevertheless...	Following... In response to... Therefore... As a result of... For this reason... The result... Thus... Due to this... Consequently... The reaction...	The first [concept/aspect]... The second [concept/aspect]... Firstly, Secondly, Finally After...Afterwards... As soon as... In the first place... In the meantime... Later... Meanwhile... Next...	Therefore... This..... Hence... In final analysis In conclusion... In final consideration... Indeed...	In other words... Specifically... For instance... For example... One such occurrence... This is demonstrated by To illustrate... Also... To demonstrate...

## Need more help?

Study Support, USQ Library can help you to develop your academic learning language and maths skills for success at university. Consultations are available face-to-face, via video chat, by phone or email.

Web: [www.usq.edu.au/library/study-support](http://www.usq.edu.au/library/study-support)

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