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READING EFFICIENTLY

The reading that you do for your studies is often different from the reading that you do for leisure. If you learn the correct technique for your reading goal, then you can save yourself time and ensure that you read efficiently and effectively for your essays, reports or tutorials. For example, sometimes you may need to decide if a text is sufficiently relevant to warrant reading it in depth or it could be important for you to locate something specific within the text.

Reading goals

Setting yourself a reading goal ensures that you read an item with a purpose, enabling you to prioritise the information that you read. To help you to define a reading goal, ask yourself: "What questions do I need answering?"

This will help you to identify the information that is centrally relevant, partially relevant or simply not relevant at all.

Reading styles, techniques and strategies

Once you have established your reading goals, you can choose the style of reading most suited to your task. The following types of reading are all commonly used, and you will probably recognise them. The SQ3R strategy might be unfamiliar to you but is a very useful technique for reading in the academic context.

Skimming, Scanning and Speed reading are useful techniques, each with a distinct purpose, for the rapid reading of text. They are not designed for reading word-for-word but for skipping over much of the content.



All study advice sheets are also available to view and download on the following website:
<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/library/students/learningsupport/adviceandplanningsheets/>

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a) Skimming

Skimming involves going through a text rapidly, probably at two or three times your normal reading speed, and being selective in what you read. It is a useful technique for deciding whether or not you are going to use a text, just as you would flip through a book or magazine in a shop. It will also help you to get some idea of the way in which the text is organised, its tone and style, to get the gist of the writer's meaning, or to review something that you have already read to refresh your memory. It is useful to skim a text before reading any item in depth, or when you only need superficial knowledge.

To skim effectively, remember to look at the index, chapter or section headings, introductory and concluding paragraphs. You can also skim through the main content by reading the first line of each paragraph. This technique should give you a flavour of the content as a whole. When you use the scanning style, you must remember to be flexible because an author might not use exactly the same keywords as you. Be prepared to think around your topic.

c). Speed reading

Speed reading is a popular technique that does require practice but once mastered will deepen your understanding of written text. Although it can involve reading an item three times this will still be quicker than reading it just once slowly. The key principle of speed reading is the idea that a large percentage of words and even sentences can be disregarded without the meaning being lost. If you would like to know more about speed reading there are a number of helpful books in stock at **428.432**.

The **intensive** reading style and the **SQ3R** technique are intended for a slower, more reflective approach to reading and to help retain written information.

d) Intensive reading

This style is used when you need a good, general understanding of a text or to discover accurately what has been written. It may also be used to prompt you to think creatively and reflectively. When adopting this style, you will probably have already skimmed through the text to see what it contains.

When reading intensively, you need to pay close attention to the text, perhaps allowing for periods in which to reflect upon what you have read. You work through the text in sequence, at a moderate speed. This style also allows plenty of time for you to make appropriate notes.

e) SQ3R

SQ3R is a technique that can be used effectively when reading for academic study. It can involve all of the above reading styles. It stands for **S**urvey, **Q**uestion, **R**ead, **R**ecall, **R**eview.

- **Survey**

Quickly look for basic information using the contents list, index, main heading etc.

- **Question**

Note down the questions that you want answered to keep your reading active and purposeful.

- **Read**

Vary your reading style and speed to identify and read the section which will help you to answer your questions. Make brief notes, if this will help.

- **Recall**

Try to answer your questions without looking at the notes you have made or the reading material.

- **Review**

Look back over the text to check if your information is accurate.

Discussing it with a friend is an extremely effective reviewing technique.

Note taking

When reading efficiently you will almost certainly need to take notes about the items that you have read. After summarising sections to test your understanding, you may find it helpful to underline, highlight or use sticky notes to identify the key points in your notes. To find out more about effective note taking, see the advice sheet on taking notes.

It is also very important to make a note of the full details of any text that you have read, so that you can cite it correctly in your work and include it in your bibliography.



Reading environment

As well as setting your reading goals and learning useful styles and techniques, to read efficiently and effectively you need to make sure that your physical environment is conducive to your work. Elements to consider include:

a) Lighting

Ensure that you have sufficient light to read comfortably, but avoid glare. The light should ideally be coming from above, or over one shoulder and it should not be reflected back at you. You should also try to avoid too harsh a contrast between your reading pool of light and the light in the surrounding area.

b) Eyesight

If you suffer from eyestrain or headaches, take a break from reading and think about getting your eyes checked by an optician. This could be a sign that you are straining them. Always take regular breaks when reading intensively – 20 minutes reading; five minute break; 20 minutes reading and so on.

c) Posture

It is important to adopt a comfortable reading position and posture to reduce fatigue and mental strain. This will enable you to work more effectively and, if necessary for longer.



Leisure reading

Don't lose the habit of reading for pleasure! There is a recognised correlation between regular recreational reading and academic achievement (National Endowment for the Arts 2007) as well as the widely acknowledged associated mental health benefits. The Leisure Reading Collection on Level 4 covers a broad range of genres including contemporary fiction, graphic novel, biography, crime, fantasy, horror and science fiction. A link to the Library's leisure reading initiatives can be found at: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/library/feature/studentreading/>