
Tips for Active Reading

Vary Speed

- ❖ The speed at which you should read depends on the text you're reading.
- ❖ Some texts can simply be skimmed while others will require two or three full read-throughs. Even the most experienced readers, writers, and researchers must re-read difficult material to understand the main gist.
- ❖ If you get through the end of a text and do not understand it, re-read it slowly.
- ❖ Because some texts require multiple readings, it is important to set aside enough time to read. Choose a comfortable place with no distractions.

Think about to What Conversation the Text Belongs

- ❖ Most published writing belongs to some type of conversation—for instance, an essay arguing for legislation that legalizes the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes in the state of Virginia belongs to both a political and a medical conversation.
- ❖ Once you start reading a text, think about what conversation it belongs to and try to enter into it.
- ❖ One way to enter into the text's conversation is to approach a text from two angles: First, as an open-minded believer who acknowledges the text's power, and then, as a skeptical doubter who tries to find weaknesses in the author's argument.

Tackle Difficult Vocabulary

- ❖ Sometimes a difficult word can be a major roadblock while you travel through a complex text. Reading with a dictionary nearby is helpful; if you don't have a dictionary but are near a computer, try the following Web sites: www.bartelby.com or www.oed.com. If English is not your first language, *Longman's Dictionary of American English* may be a useful tool.
- ❖ If you feel stopping to look up a word slows you down too much, circle it and look it up later.
- ❖ Remember that while using a dictionary will give you a definition, it is up to you to analyze the sentence(s) surrounding the word for tone that may affect word meaning.

Write in the Margins

- ❖ Instead of highlighting, use a pen or pencil to make marginal notes within and on the border of the text. Use the margins for summarizing, questioning, or making personal connections to the text—don't be scared to mark all over the paper.
- ❖ Anytime you feel the urge to highlight, ask yourself why you want to. Was it because of a certain word that struck you? Was it a key point in the argument? Did it appeal to your emotions? Write the answer you come up with in the margin beside the text.

Keep a Reading Log

- ❖ After each reading assignment, write whether or not you liked it and why within your reading log. Think of your reading log as a journal or diary: You can say anything you'd like to say without anyone else having to see it. If you absolutely hate the piece, state why. If the piece is life-changing, write why. Figuring out why you like or dislike the text will help you begin to closely analyze it—not to mention, when you are discussing the piece in class, you will be prepared to comment on it.

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