

HOW TO... Develop your Reading Skills

Methods of reading

We all use a number of reading approaches depending on what we want to know. Here's a note of some reading methods.

Reading method	What is it?	What is the purpose?
Detailed reading	Reading the whole text carefully and thoughtfully – but not necessarily slowly	Complete understanding
Reading for enjoyment	Reading at whatever pace suits you	Pleasure
Skimming	Finding out what a chapter or a book is mainly about	General impression
Scanning	Looking for specific detail by running your eye down the page quickly	Fact finding
Detecting bias	Some written work is aiming to be persuasive e.g. adverts, political leaflets etc – you need to separate fact from opinion	Make up your own mind
Critical reading	Slower reading to assess the content of a document, or for taking notes	Analyse information or for note taking

Skimming

Skimming is a method of reading where you skim a page or chapter of a book or magazine to get an idea of what it's about.

You don't read every word on the page, just:

- ❖ Title of the book/magazine and any sub-headings
- ❖ First sentence from each paragraph or the first paragraph of the chapter
- ❖ Last sentence from each paragraph or the last paragraph of the chapter
- ❖ If the chapter has a summary, read it first
- ❖ Have a look at any diagrams, graphs or charts – a picture has instant impact
- ❖ Look out for words in **bold** or *italics* – this indicates important keywords or ideas, so read the paragraph around these words

Scanning

Scanning is a method of quickly reading a page to find a specific piece of information you need. You don't need to read every word; just run your eye over the page looking for your keyword. Once you've spotted it, read that paragraph closely to get the information you need.

You will use a combination of skimming and scanning when researching for essays and course work.

Speed reading

It takes practice to get faster in reading. One way to do this is by making your eyes move forward, allowing them to stop only four, three or two times, as you get faster along each line. Do not allow your eyes to go back at words you have read.

Another way to increase your speed in reading is to vary the speed. Like driving a car, which is in different gears, read slowly and speed up, then slow again. It stimulates your mind so that you are more attentive.

You could also try using a pencil or finger and hold it over the page. You then let your eye follow the pencil or finger as you move it down the middle of the page. Your eye will "chunk" the information either side of the "point" as you move downwards. This expands the amount of text you see as opposed to when you are reading in the standard fashion from left to right. The effect is to give you the gist of what's on the page, quickly.

SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review)

This is a 5 stage active reading technique which can help you get the best out of your reading and improve the quality of your study time. Following the 5 stages will help you to separate important information from irrelevant data:

Survey	This combines skimming and scanning a document. Survey the document: scan the contents, introduction, chapter introductions and summaries etc. Decide if this will give you the information you want – if not, don't spend any more time on this.
Question	Once you've carried out your survey, make a note of any questions on the subject. Setting questions will help you to structure the information in your own mind.
Read	Read through the useful sections, taking care to understand all the relevant points. Take your time as it is important to

	understand the information – it may help to take notes at this point.
Recall	Once you have read the relevant sections, think it over and try to identify the core facts or the essential information behind the subject.
Review	You can review the information by rereading the document, by expanding your notes, or by discussing the material with others.

Reading critically

Whenever you read a text you should always be asking yourself if it provides the answers to your questions – Who? Why? What? Where?

You must also ask questions about the content:

- ❖ Does the author provide evidence to back his/her views?
- ❖ Is there any information missing in the argument?
- ❖ Is the information up-to-date?
- ❖ Is the focus too narrow or too broad?
- ❖ Is the author certain of their facts – i.e. do they use words such as could, might or most?
- ❖ Are the author's views contradicted in other sources? And if so, is this expected or from lack of information?

Key points

- ❖ Adjust your reading speed depending on the kind of text or your purpose for reading.
- ❖ Keep a dictionary nearby to look up terms you don't understand as you go along.
- ❖ If you don't have a dictionary to hand, look for clues in the earlier part of the text or later on to see if this helps make an idea or term clearer.
- ❖ Don't worry if you can't remember everything; write some things down to remind you.
- ❖ The more you read – whether it's a book or just a poster on a bus – will help improve your reading skills.
- ❖ When reading for study, always remember the essay question and look for answers to the Who? Why? What? Where? Questions to answer your essay.