



Active Reading Strategies

What is active reading? Why do some people follow along, maintain better recall, and understand the material better than others? The following strategies provide some structure and techniques to develop active reading techniques.

When we talk about “reading” a text, please keep in mind that any modality is a valid form of reading (audiobook, digital text, physical book, etc.). Depending on the nature of an audio text, you may need to adjust recommendations to best fit your reading modality.

Always consider that good reading takes time and you need to plan for that time.

Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review (SQ3R)

Survey/Prediction

- Preview what you are going to be reading!
- Pay attention to the title, author, publication date
- Skim the headings, subheadings, charts, graphs

Questions

- While surveying the text, what questions do you have?
- Are there specific questions your professor wants you to answer or themes to which this particular text is being linked?
- Good questions to always think about:
 - Why is the author writing?
 - What is the author’s argument?
 - What are the main takeaways?

Read!

- Read first (introduction) and last (summary/conclusion) paragraphs FIRST to give yourself a frame/scaffold
- Think about your questions! Refer to them as needed to help guide your reading as you seek out the answers to those questions
- Highlight, underline, and/or annotate main ideas and key facts and details
- Ask yourself:
 - What stands out?
 - How does the material relate to other material and/or relate to class?

- What is the main idea of each paragraph?
- At the end of reading, write or dictate a 3-5 sentence summary. Can you summarize and distill down the essence of what you just finished reading?

Recite

- Speak back to yourself or a peer the main idea of the reading, key facts and details, and the author's argument and/or conclusions
 - Putting the information in another modality can help you retain the information better and make the process more interactive
- Similarly, If there are practice problems, talking your way through your answers might help you solidify a concept or more skillfully put it into practice while the information is fresh and is still in your short-term memory

Review

- Review your reading notes to answer the initial questions you had
- Prepare questions to take to class or to office hours if there are concepts that are still not clicking for you

Other Reading Techniques/Recommendations

Dense readings

Some readings are more dense and require modified approaches. If you are struggling with a certain text more than usual it can help to focus on one paragraph (or chunk that makes sense) at a time. Glean what you can from that paragraph and then write a one sentence paraphrase of it. Move onto the second paragraph and when you write your paraphrase incorporate the information from the first paragraph as well. Continue in this manner until you have completed the reading.

Oftentimes a simple re-reading of the text will also help to fill in the gaps of your understanding.

Managing distractions:

- *Location:* Some people do their most focused work alone and without distractions, others prefer a "hum" of activity, some need to stand, use a balance ball, or otherwise engage their bodies. You may have other preferences and needs, and these are all valid! Find a location that works best for you for this particular academic task.
- *Time:* Some people find that their minds will start to wander after a certain period of time. Use a Pomodoro timekeeper, or set yourself alarms at regular intervals so you can check in with yourself and figure out if you need a water break or a minute to walk around, zone out, etc. before getting back to your task. Consider the time of day you focus on your

readings. If you focus better in the mornings, take advantage of that. You can also split up your readings and tackle them in bursts throughout the day instead of trying to get through them in a single sitting.

- *Modality:* If you find that you are not comprehending material like you would like to, try listening along with your reading as you go. Multiplying your modalities may help you both with distractions (since you are engaging your aural intake of information) and with reading comprehension.
- *Other people:* If you know that others are an unhelpful distraction, be clear with your friends and classmates about your boundaries and needs—Example: “I’ll grab a coffee with you at 12:45, but until then I need to focus.”