

Using reading strategies

Efficient readers use advanced reading strategies to save time and cover a lot of ground. Your purpose for reading should determine which strategy or strategies to use for handling a reading task most efficiently and effectively. The main strategies are: overviewing, skimming, scanning and intensive reading. You will also need to use critical analysis when reading. Our handout Critical Analysis explains what this involves and provides a series of questions to ask about the texts you read.

Overview

When you gain an overview of a text you get an idea of what it contains without actually reading the main body of the text.

Gaining an overview is useful for several reasons:

- It helps you in the selection process, i.e. to decide whether a book or journal is useful for your purposes.
- It alerts you to which part of the text contains the information you need, which also means identifying the parts you don't need to read.
- In some cases, it eliminates the need for detailed reading, because your question has already been answered during the overview process.

You gain an overview by reading only the parts of the text that 'jump out at you', i.e. the segments with changed print and graphics. These contain the broadest outlines of the text. Don't read the standard print. For a journal article, read the abstract (the opening summary) and the conclusion.

Changed print tells you that something is important. It is designed to stand out. It includes any part of the text in **bold**, in *italics*, underlined or in CAPITAL LETTERS. This will most likely be headings, subheadings, key words or technical terms, bullet points, numbered lists, captions, photos or illustrations.

Graphics are there to illustrate and support the text. They take the form of diagrams, maps, graphs, cartoons or photos. They can give you a lot of information relatively quickly.

After gaining an overview you should be able to:

- recount at least some of the main ideas of the text
- be fairly sure whether the text will be useful for your reading task

- know which part of the text will contain the information you need
- perhaps avoid reading any further for that task.

Skimming

This involves running your eye very quickly over large chunks of text. It's different from gaining an overview, because when skimming you deal with the standard print. You are trying to pick up some of the main ideas without paying attention to detail. It's a fast process. A single chapter should take only a few minutes.

You would choose to skim read if there is very little changed print to gain an overview of a text. Skimming adds further information to an overview, and may allow you to avoid further reading.

How to skim:

- Review your reading task.
- Note any changed print and graphics.
- Start at the beginning and glide your eyes over the text very quickly. You don't actually read the text in total. You may read a few words of every paragraph, perhaps the first and last sentences.

Always familiarise yourself with the reading material by gaining an overview and/or skimming before reading in detail.

Scanning

Scanning is sweeping your eyes (like radar) over part of a text to find specific pieces of information.

How to scan:

- After gaining an overview and skimming, identify the part of the text that probably contains the information you need.
- Read the question again, or be clear what it is you are looking for.
- Scan the text. As soon as your eye catches an important word or phrase, stop reading.
- Read the material close to this point. Can you complete your task? If not, scan the material again.

Intensive reading

When you've used the techniques of overview, skimming and scanning to narrow down the reading field, then you can settle into intensive reading, which is detailed, focused, 'study' reading of those important parts, pages or chapters. Remember to organise what you need to do into manageable segments with their own time frames.

How to read intensively:

- Write down bibliographic information. For a book you need author, date, title, publisher and city of publication. In the case of a journal article you need author, date, article title, journal title, volume number, issue number and page numbers of the article.
- Start at the beginning. Underline any vocabulary you don't know, but don't stop the flow of your reading.
- If the text is relatively easy, underline, highlight or make brief notes.
- If the text is difficult, read through once or several times (depending on the level of difficulty) and then take notes.
- Be alert to the main ideas. Each paragraph should have a main idea, usually contained in the first sentence.
- If paraphrasing or copying sections for quoting, write the page number in the margin of your notes for future referencing on this material in your paper.
- When you've finished go back to the new vocabulary. Look it up in an ordinary or subject-specific dictionary. Keep a new word book or card system.

Summary – Remember, when approaching reading at university you need to make intelligent decisions about what you choose to read, be flexible in the way you read, and think about what you're trying to achieve in undertaking each reading task.

Useful resources

Marshall, L & Rowland, F 1998, *A guide to learning Independently*, 3rd edn, Addison Wesley Longman, Melbourne.

Orr, F 1992, *Study skills for successful students*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney.

taken from:

<http://www.deakin.edu.au/studentlife/academic-skills/handouts/reading.php#skimming>