

## Effective Reading Strategies for International Students

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Before you start reading, always consider what your purposes are in reading, and what you need to get from the text. This will allow you to use a targeted strategy when reading, save time, and achieve your goals more effectively.

You can **scan** a document quickly when you are looking for particular individual facts or details

You can **skim** when you want to learn the main point of an article fairly quickly

You should **read** (and re-read) when you need to understand all or most of the text

Using **pre-reading strategies** will also help you use your time more effectively. Before you start reading the whole, look at these particular aspects of the text. Your questions may be answered through this stage of reading, or if you are reading more carefully later, you will find it easier because you already have a sense of what the text covers.

In a **book**, look at the preface, chapter titles, and epilogue/closing. In some fields, you can also consult **book reviews** that will present you with an overview of the material, and a critical stance on it.

For an **article** or **chapter**, read the opening and closing paragraphs, and try to find the specific argument.

Look at the **headings** and **subheadings**, to get a sense of the structure and progression of the argument.

Glance at the **citations**. What sources are they citing and quoting? Do these references seem adequate and up-to-date (at the time of writing)?

Scan for **keywords**, and note and look up **unknown vocabulary**, if it is used repeatedly.

### **Strategies for Closer Reading (and Re-Reading)**

Remember and use what you learned from the pre-reading stage.

Continue to have a focus for reading (such as certain questions you want to answer), and let this motivation guide how you read.

Annotate your text and take notes as you read.

Stop after each paragraph to test your comprehension. If you cannot sum up the paragraph succinctly in your own words (and the material seems important), go back and reread.

You may need to develop reading strategies for a second language that are different than what you use for your first language. Be conscious of what you struggle with (concentration, understanding, memory, vocabulary, time) and consider how you can adapt to meet those challenges.

### **After you finish reading...**

Write a short summary of the text in your own words. Even if you are keeping detailed notes on a text, it is helpful (for your understanding at present and for future reference) to have a short précis of the argument, and then follow it with more specific points.

Include in your notes your current assessment of the material (How persuasive is the argument? how does it fit within the existing literature?)

Note what further questions you have. Also note citations for other texts you might want to read.

Consider and record how you want to use this information.

If you think it would be helpful, discuss the article with other readers.

### **Other Questions to Consider:**

Why did the author write this? What need in scholarship is it trying to fulfill? (Does it do so?) What are the author's motivations?

What is the author's methodology?

What main ideas are presented? What major details are important in relation to these main ideas? What examples are used?

Is the argument complete? Do you agree or disagree with the author?

How does this piece relate to other scholarship you've read on the subject?

**If you can't answer these questions, consider whether you need to reread.**

When reading in a second language, one also has to consider whether or not to **translate** into one's native tongue in one's head as one reads. This is up to the individual, but there are advantages and disadvantages to either strategy.

Advantages of simultaneous translation include that it may improve your comprehension and retention of ideas.

Advantages of not translating includes the facts that it tends to be a faster process, and that it will strengthen your facility in the language you read.

Also consider which language will be most helpful to you for taking notes. But if a point is especially important, it can be wise to quote it in the original language.

**Remember that even when reading closely, it is unlikely that you need to read and understand every single word. Aim for a general comprehension.**

When reading, also note **new vocabulary**

1. Try to figure out the meaning from context
2. Write the word down (with its assumed meaning)
3. When finished reading, look up your list of words
4. If your assumed meaning and the actual meaning differ too much, return to the text and correct your understanding
5. Keep a running list of these words and definitions, and try to add these to your vocabulary over time.