How many pages?!!

The quantity and complexity of your course readings may be overwhelming at first. With some practical advice and some practice, it will not be so difficult to complete your weekly list of readings. In fact, our strategies for critical and efficient reading will also help you to better understand and analyse what you read.

Preview the text: What’s the point?

Although it may seem counterintuitive to practising efficient reading, it is best if you do not rush right into the text. Look to your syllabus to see the week’s topic and consider how the chapter or article will help you to better understand important content or themes. Identify the important points or content by reading the introductory paragraphs or learning objectives for the chapter and the concluding paragraphs or summary. Knowing the key ideas or thesis of the chapter or article before you read it in its entirety is useful; when you do read the rest of the text, you do not have to guess where it is going and you can skim over irrelevant sections.

This is an important adaptive strategy to manage the bulk in reading. You may sometimes use this method to skim through the readings you did not complete before a lecture or to eliminate books when conducting research. This is not cheating. This is an important survival tip that you many not believe and may not use until you are behind in your readings.

Questions for Analysis & Evaluation

Read Actively & With Purpose
• How does this relate to the lecture, lab or tutorial?
• How does it fit into the themes of the course?
• Is it all new or have you learned some of it before?
• Is it giving you lots of information or is it trying to persuade you of something?
• Is it neutral or biased?
• Do you agree with it?
• When/where/how can you use this information?
• How or why is it important?

Questions for Understanding
• What are the main ideas and key principles? How are they organized? How do they connect to each other? How do they connect to the thesis or learning objectives of the text?
• What place do they have in the discipline?
• How can I apply this information?
• What examples are used to illustrate?
Also try:
• Reading aloud difficult bits
• Highlighting different kinds of information in different colours
Do something with your reading!

Read – Think – Write
Try highlighting – but sparingly. Otherwise the entire page may be yellow. Underline or highlight key definitions, names, dates, places, or central points of an argument.

Write questions, comments, concerns in the margin of your text (if you own it).

Take notes – but not too many. Be selective. Use the information from your text preview; summarize whole sections or paragraphs. Don’t copy! Ask questions and include personal responses and reflections.

Study guides can be very helpful: summaries, study questions, bold terms, multiple choice tests and more. Read them in your preview to help you read actively. Or use them for review.

Think about your reading skills.

Does reading seem to take too long? Or do you lose interest quickly?

Reading can take time; it often takes so long because it is difficult to maintain focus or interest. By reading actively, by understanding the purpose and point of the reading, you may find this easier. Use the preview techniques to identify the purpose, format and key point(s) of the text before you begin to read. Just like a long car ride, if you know the destination and the key landmarks on the way, the trip is much shorter.

Read actively.
Read critically.
Read efficiently.

Think about your reading skills.

Do you have trouble remembering what you read?

In order to retain information, it is necessary for it to have meaning for the reader. Don’t just read to understand the material; you must reflect on it and evaluate it. Use the questions for active reading – they are intended to spark critical thinking about the text. Record your analysis. Write notes in your words to explain, question, support, oppose the text. Make it mean something to you.

Think about your reading skills.

Do you seem to spend a lot of time checking the dictionary or glossary of your text?

For every bolded word or unusual term, it is not necessary to jump directly to the glossary or dictionary. Highlight the word, complete the sentence and guess the meaning of the word from the context of the sentence or paragraph. If you take the time to learn the meaning of a new word from its context in a sentence, you will understand and remember its meaning. If you still need to look up the word, take the time to explain the definition in your own words, elaborating and repeating the meaning in different ways. Simplify the definition and (pretend to) explain it to a 12-year old.

The Academic Skills Centre
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A strategy for you?
Meet with an Academic Skills Instructor to make these approaches work for you.