

The Academic Resource Center
At Wheeling Jesuit University
(304) 243-4473

How to Read a College Textbook

Reading Effectively

Learning to read effectively is an important study skill. It aids in the retention of information and serves as a necessary addition to the information you gain in class. You can improve your reading skills by making the following changes in your current style.

DO

- Learn to read larger groups of words with one glance
- Control the speed of your reading depending on the type of material being read
- Slow your speed down if the material is technical or unfamiliar
- Expand your vocabulary
- Read with a dictionary beside you to look up any words you don't know

DON'T

- Point to words or move your lips while reading
- Focus on each word individually
- Skip over words you don't understand

Creating the Right Environment

Before you jump into reading, it is important to prepare yourself. Make sure that you aren't hungry or over-tired, that you have a good light, and that you keep distractions to a minimum. Controlling your environment in this way will help you concentrate and get more out of what you are reading.

Before you Read, Preview

Skim over chapter titles, introductions, headings, and boldfaced or italicized words before you begin reading. Also pay attention to chapter summaries and review questions to get an idea about what will be covered. Consider why you were asked to read this particular assignment.

As You Read

Pay attention to main ideas and supporting details as you read. Examine charts, pictures and graphs included with the text. Evaluate the material. Do you agree with what is being said? Does it make sense to you?

Taking Notes and Marking Your Text

Don't overdo it with your highlighter. Only highlight or underline main ideas, names of important people or dates, key terms, or statements that summarize the main elements of the passage. Use cross-referencing while you read. If you see a point on a page that relates to something you have read previously, make notes in the margin of each page referring to the other page that has related information.

After Your Read

Verbally summarize what you have read to help improve your retention. Write down any areas that were confusing or if you had questions about and ask your instructor as soon as possible. Review what you've read frequently. After class, make notes on how the assigned reading related to the lecture.

Textbook Reading for Specific Subjects

Mathematics – Add a “practice” stage for solving problems during the review stage of your reading. Make sure all the problems are solved before you move on to the next chapter. If you have trouble solving the problems, form a study group with others or stop by the Academic Resource Center to set up an appointment with a tutor. If you move on without understanding the prior information, you are likely to understand even less in the following chapters.

Sciences – Add a “draw” stage to give you time to draw out diagrams, charts, etc. Drawing out the information will make it easier to learn and remember.

Literature – During your review stage, add “interpret” and “evaluate”. Literature involves not just reading but interpreting and evaluating what you read. Write brief statements of your interpretation or evaluation beside the story, poem, etc.

Foreign Languages – Like mathematics, you need to add a “practice” stage to your review stage. It is essential that you know the basics before you begin to add more information. Flashcards and conjugation tables are good tools to use during this “practice” stage.

For Extra Help

If you would like additional tips on improving your study skills, feel free to stop by or call the Academic Resource Center at 243-4473 to make an appointment. This number can also be used to set up appointments with tutors for a specific subject area.

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