



ACADEMIC READING

If you have trouble understanding or remembering material you need to read for study for a vocational training or university course, here are some ideas to try.

Your problem may be one or all of the following:

- Unfamiliar terminology
- Texts written in an unfamiliar way. (You can read the newspaper, but these texts are written in a different way!)
- Too many unfamiliar ideas

Some suggestions

1. Read a simpler version first

If the problem text is overloaded with new concepts, find a book or article covering the same or similar topic written in a simpler way and read that first. Perhaps even try the internet, or get someone to talk about the topic.

2. Skim

First skim, or read the difficult text superficially to start with, just to get the broad picture. Don't get bogged down in the details. When you finish, jot down what you can remember of the main ideas, or highlight them in the text. Then when you return to re-read it you have a big picture framework to build on.

3. Clarify new vocabulary

Start to clarify some of the unknown vocabulary. However, remember that with technical language, a dictionary type definition is sometimes not very much help. You may not understand some of the words until the whole concept is clear.

4. Read actively

Make sure you begin to read with an active, questioning mind rather than just reading words. Don't try to read every text in the same way, since you will have different purposes for everything you read. For example, if you are reading to find specific information, just skim and look for that, rather than trying to read the whole chapter or article in detail.

Try this routine:

➤ **Scan**

First read headings, sub headings, look at illustrations and graphics and their captions. Search for clues to suggest how the article or chapter is organised. (*Is it a description of something or some process? ... Is it a discussion of points for and against some idea? ... Is it a narrative or story of what happened? ...*) The first paragraph and the sub headings will usually help here.

➤ **Question**

What questions pop into your mind? (*What is this all about? ... Is it a historical survey of the topic? ... Does that chart tell me about the increase in recent years? ... What on earth does 'multiple type families' mean? ... Is this about the video we saw in class? ... I wonder if it relates to Piaget's theory?...*) The questions may not turn out to be really relevant. That doesn't matter. The important thing is that you are reading with an active, questioning mind which is what all good readers do subconsciously when they are reading.



If you can't think of your own questions, try turning sub headings into questions.

➤ **Read**

Now read. You are now reading for a *purpose*.

➤ **Review**

At the end of each section, look away from the book for a few seconds and think back over the information, taking time to check back on anything you are not sure of. Imagine you are explaining it to someone else.

Perhaps make a **mind map** of what you have read. It is difficult to remember things that aren't properly organised in our minds. We understand and remember things best when we have to do something with the information - when we have to make sense of it. Mind mapping will help you to do this. A mind map is a diagram of the main points in a text, using the key words with arrows and other symbols (eg + or =) to show the relationship between them.

Why not call the Reading Writing Hotline and speak with one of our helpful teachers who can give you other ideas to help you with your academic reading?