

SO MUCH TO READ

In undertaking a tertiary course, you will be required to read widely and in depth in a number of subject areas. Some subjects will be new for you and the reading will be quite challenging. You will find that authors think and write in different ways for different subject areas. This leaflet offers some suggestions to make your reading both efficient and effective.

HOW YOU READ DEPENDS ON YOUR PURPOSE FOR READING

Ask yourself: 'Why am I reading this? Am I looking for background information, quotations or support for my own arguments?' If the topic or material is new, you may need to spend some time developing a basic understanding of the new subject area before you read in depth.

- ◆ Begin with a general introduction, such as an encyclopaedia, general textbook or subject dictionary, and read slowly.
- ◆ Jot down new terms that keep recurring. Make sure you understand their meanings. Write them in your own words.
- ◆ Write down some key words and their synonyms to find in the text.

THE FIVE POINT READING PLAN

- Predict** What do you already know about this subject? What do you expect the text to talk about? Go to the **Index** at the back. Pick out the key words or names you need to follow up. Look at the information about the authors of the text and the date when the book or article was first published. This may help you to understand the authors' point of view and where their work fits in with other publications in the same field.
- Skim** the contents page before you begin reading. It will give you an overview of what the book covers and what the authors thought was important. Move quickly through the first and last paragraphs to get a general idea of the content of the text.
- Scan** Look for specific information, including your keywords and their synonyms.
- Analyse** When you have found relevant paragraphs, read them more carefully. Be an active reader. Ask questions like, 'What is the author saying?' 'How can I use this information?' 'Does this agree or disagree with other readings?' 'How does this information relate to my experience?'
- Note** Take careful notes.

RESEARCH NOTES FROM READING

Be selective in making notes. Analyse your assignment topic before making notes. Think about your purpose for making notes and the information you specifically need to record. You are rarely asked to write down all you can think of about a topic. Usually you are required to show that you can interpret and use information to answer a specific question.

Here are some practical suggestions on noting from texts:

- ♦ Choose either index cards or A4 paper. Use one side only.
- ♦ Record full bibliographical details for later use.
- ♦ Leave a margin and good spacing for later comments and highlighting.
- ♦ Use sub-headings. Invent a short title for each new note you make. This aids tracking down and assembling information later.
- ♦ Colour-code your notes to show different topic areas.
- ♦ Make notes about the chapter and page number as you progress through a text.
- ♦ Whenever possible, use your own words in your notes, to help you understand the reading.
- ♦ If you need to use an exact, short quotation, copy it down accurately and use quotation marks (' ') so there is no confusion as to the author. Distinguish a direct quotation by using inverted commas or writing it in another colour pen. Its source will need to be properly acknowledged in your own writing.
- ♦ Label any photocopied material clearly with topic, date and bibliographic details as applicable. Store with your other notes.
- ♦ Organise and file your notes under subject and topic headings. This can be done alphabetically with a filing system, with clearly marked or coloured folders, or in any way that works well for you.
- ♦ Store carefully. Your notes are irreplaceable. Avoid overuse of fluorescent markers when reading photocopied material. Too much colour coding can make your text confusing. Brief notes in your own words are more useful. These can be made in the margin of photocopied material.

USING AND REVISING YOUR NOTES

If your notes seem like random pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, put them under the headings of your main points, return to your assignment topic or tutorial question and when you see where they all fit, they will make a lot more sense.

- ♦ Add your own thoughts and questions, as well as relevant points from your lecture notes.
- ♦ Use your notes not only for essay writing, but also for revision.
- ♦ Try to adapt the ideas, issues and facts in your notes to prepare for alternative exam questions on a topic.
- ♦ Try to understand the material in your notes well enough so that you could teach it to others.

READING JOURNAL ARTICLES

Journal articles form an essential part of your reading on a topic. They are just as important as books, and provide you with current ideas and debate. Journal articles typically start with an **Abstract**, which summarises the article, including the rationale for the study, the main results, the methodology used and an interpretation of the results. Scientific journal articles contain many of the same features as social sciences or humanities articles. The following points apply to articles of many kinds, and suggest questions to ask yourself when you are reading:

- ♦ What is the overall aim of the article/study/experiment?
- ♦ What specific problem is being addressed?
- ♦ What methods have been used to investigate the problem?
 - ♦ What is the rationale behind the methods employed?
 - ♦ What are the conditions under which the research/experiments were performed?
 - ♦ What are the limitations of the methods?
 - ♦ Was there an adequate sample size?
 - ♦ Was there an adequate control?
- ♦ What experiments (if any) have been performed?
- ♦ What were the results of the experiments/study?
 - ♦ Are all the results presented or only a representative sample?
 - ♦ What do the tables and graphs mean?
- ♦ Are there any statistics? Are they interpreted accurately and based on experimental results?
- ♦ Does the discussion section interpret the results or make assumptions?
- ♦ Do the results, interpretation and conclusions match the overall aim of the study?
- ♦ Has the study contributed to an increased understanding of this area?
What further studies could or should be performed?

If you would like more help with reading, visit the Student Learning Centre and talk to an academic advisor, or try the following references.

REFERENCES

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- Zeegers, P 1998, *An introduction to the study of science at university*, Flinders Press, Adelaide.

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