

Reading Critically

Skills Enhancement & Tutoring Center

Ask yourself the following questions as you read:

- What is the topic of the book or reading? What issues are addressed?
- What conclusion does the author reach about the issue(s)?
- What are the author's reasons for his or her statements or belief? Is the author using facts, theory, or faith?
- Has the author used neutral words or emotional words? Critical readers look beyond the language to see if the reasons are clear
- Be aware of why you do, or do not, accept arguments of the author

Characteristics of Critical Thinkers

- They are honest with themselves
- They resist manipulation
- They overcome confusion
- They ask questions
- They base judgments on evidence
- They look for connections between subjects
- They are intellectually independent

Wakefield, D.V., *Critical Thinking*. From a paper to the Governor's Teaching Fellows, Athens Georgia, November 19, 1998.

Taking Notes from a Textbook

First: read a section of your textbook chapter

- Read just enough to keep an understanding of the material
Do not take notes, but rather focus on understanding the material

It is tempting to take notes as you are reading the first time, but this is not an efficient technique; you are likely to take down too much information and simply copy without understanding

Second: Review the material

- Locate the main ideas as well as important sub-points
- Set the book aside
- Paraphrase this information
Putting the textbook information in your own words forces you to become actively involved with the material

Third: write the paraphrased ideas as your notes

- Do not copy information directly from the textbook
- Add only enough detail to understand

Review and compare your notes with the text, and ask yourself if you truly understand

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Reading Difficult Material

- **Choose a moderate amount of material or a chapter** to begin
- **Get a grasp of how the material is organized:** Scan the section for titles, headings, sub-headings, and topic sentences to get its general idea; pay attention to graphs, charts, and diagrams
- **If there is a summary at the end of a chapter**, read it. Check the beginning and the end for leading questions and exercises
- **Read first for what you do understand** and to determine difficulty. Mark what you do not understand to review later.
- **As you read, practice the "look-away method:"** Periodically look away from the text and ask yourself a stimulus question relating to the text. Phrase the question positively! Respond, or restate, in your own words. Make connections and associations, but don't use this exercise to memorize but rather to understand
- **Look up words** whose meanings are important to your understanding of the material but that you cannot discern from the context.
- **Read to the end.** Do not get discouraged and stop reading. Ideas can become clearer the more you read. When you finish reading, review to see what you have learned, and reread those ideas that are not clear.
- **Organize your notes by connecting ideas** you choose into an outline or concept map. Pay attention to relationships between ideas.
- **Do not confine yourself to words!** Use representations, graphics, pictures, colors, even movement to visualize and connect ideas. Use whatever techniques work to help you understand
- **At this point, if you do not understand your reading**, do not panic! Set it aside, and read it again the next day. If necessary, repeat. This allows your brain to process the material, even while you sleep. This is referred to as distributed reading.
- **Re-read the section you have chosen with the framework** (outline or concept map) you have constructed in mind. Separate out what you do understand from what you do not.
- **If the reading is still a challenge**, consult with your teacher, academic counselors, or reading specialists. Good luck!

Strategies for Active Reading

- Preview chapters before lectures
- Create chapter outlines, read chapter summaries
- Divide the chapter into manageable sections
- Write summaries in your own words after each section
- Highlight key concepts and main ideas
- Review definitions and key words
- Use note cards to write formulas and main ideas
- Use note cards to write out questions and answers
- Form a study group
- Practice teaching group members main concepts
- Use concept maps to create connections between concepts
- Answer end-of-chapter questions
- Compare reading notes with lecture notes
- Read sitting in a firm chair
- Read difficult material standing up
- Ask questions of what you're reading
- Focus on main ideas, not individual words. Look for examples that support main points.

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→ Figuring it out together →

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