

READING EFFECTIVELY

Key Points:

- Reading effectively requires a balance of speed and comprehension.
- Different types of reading call for different pacing and different levels of engagement.
- Both speed and comprehension can be improved with practice.

If you've noticed that you read significantly more slowly than your peers, it's possible that you have an undiagnosed learning difference. Contact the Director of Disability Support Services (disability-services@reed.edu), if you'd like to discuss getting an assessment or accommodations for a possible learning disability.

READING MORE QUICKLY

Budget your time:

It's important to be realistic about how long it'll take to read a given assignment. Consider these averages (from the University of Ohio's Academic Advancement website):

The average student can read 8-10 pages of natural science in an hour.

The average student can read 10-12 pages of social science text in an hour.

The average student can read 12-15 pages of narrative text (novels or plays) in an hour.

In addition to content considerations, ask yourself what you want to get out of the reading and budget your time accordingly.

We read with our eyes:

Get your eyes checked regularly. Reed sends students to the Woodstock Eye clinic up by Safeway. They offer a small student discount, but if price is an issue, see the HCC for a rudimentary test to get you started. Optometrists recommend eye check ups every two years, especially if you wear corrective lenses.

Computers can be harmful to your eyes. When you have the choice, consider printing materials instead of viewing them online. Other options include adjusting ambient lighting, changing the contrast/brightness of the screen, blinking more often, and taking breaks to prevent eyestrain.

Eye break exercise: For every 20 minutes spent focusing on your computer screen or paper, spend 20 seconds focusing on something else 20 feet away.

Eliminating Regression:

Regression is re-reading. Use index cards (or a ruler) to trace your reading. There are fewer words to distract your eye, and it'll force you to notice how often you have to go back and re-read. Try to eliminate re-reading by staying more focused and eliminating distractions.

Eliminating Distractions:

- Select an appropriate place to work:
 - Pay attention to lighting, temperature, furniture (don't read in bed), clothing, etc. You want to be comfortable, but not too comfortable.
 - Monitor your visual and auditory distractions, which might mean avoiding easy access to windows and doors. Practice not looking up when a door opens or when you hear voices. Earplugs may help.
 - Consider mixing up your locations, especially if you start to feel restless or unproductive.
 - Traveling a bit further than usual to your study destination sometimes helps. You made it all the way there, so you're less likely to give up and go home.
- Make it hard for others to disturb you:
 - Turn off your phone, put a "do not disturb" sign on your door, and alert your roommate(s) that you have work to do.
 - Schedule your social activities around your work plan; don't let unexpected interruptions throw you off track.
- Avoid the internet.
 - Try: leaving your charger at home, turning off/disabling your airport, uninstalling games, making a list of things to look up online and do it all at once, etc.
 - If the temptation is too high, try one of these: *Freedom*—For macs/pcs: locks your internet access for up to 8 hours and requires a reboot to get back online. Free trial or \$10. *Anti-Social*—Same idea, just for macs, only blocks social networking kinds of sites (but you can modify the list to reflect your trouble spots). Free trial or \$15.
 - Some students report that working in a public place where others can see your computer screen makes it easier to avoid the temptation to play online.
- Manage your internal distractions:
 - Trust your plan. Remind yourself that you'll have time for everything else later, so you only need to focus on one thing right now.
 - If you're thinking about non-academic matters, making a quick list or jotting down some goals can help clear your mind.
 - If you're really stressing out, take a 5-10 minute break.
- Take care of yourself!
 - Get adequate rest. If you're falling asleep while you read, you're not being productive. If you read in order to fall asleep, try re-reading (and therefore reinforcing) material you're already familiar with.
 - Get adequate exercise. If you're sluggish or antsy, it'll be harder to focus.
 - Get adequate nutrition. Brains need fuel!
 - Take short breaks. Walk around a little, stretch, or get a drink of water to stimulate blood circulation to your brain. Practice taking deep breaths using your diaphragm instead of your chest. If you're using the 20-20-20 method, take a short break every other time you look up (every 40 minutes).
 - Give yourself rewards for time spent on task.

GET MORE OUT OF WHAT YOU READ

Before reading:

- Activate prior knowledge. What do you already know about this reading?
- Understand your task and set goals. Are you re-reading? Reading to see if you need to read the whole text? Studying for an exam? Looking for something to write your paper on? Trying to find something interesting to say in conference? Do you need to take notes?
- Budget your time according to your goals.

During reading: "Reading actively" will help you comprehend and remember more.

- Anticipate and predict what comes next. Check to see if you were correct.
- When you don't understand something, choose a strategy to get yourself back on track. For example: ignore that section and read on; suspend judgment and look ahead for clarification; form a tentative hypothesis and read on to see if you are correct; reread the current sentence; reread the previous context; go to an expert source.
- Use contextual analysis to understand new terms. Write down unfamiliar terms, but only look them up if they repeat or seem essential.
- Use the text's structure to assist comprehension; ask yourself how the information is organized and why. Is there a chronology? A building of evidence? An enumeration of examples? Does the author contradict herself?
- Organize and integrate new information (vs. just adding it on)
- Self-monitor comprehension. Track how much you're understanding and what you're not. Consider this when budgeting your time.

After reading:

- Reflect. You can summarize, talk about it with a friend, jot down questions or comments to bring up in class, consider how it relates to other subjects, etc.
- To avoid "eye glide" (looking at the page without taking in the contents) close your eyes at the end of each section and mentally recap what you just learned. If you aren't able to do so, go back and re-read.
- Seek additional information from outside sources. If time permits, read another author's summary of the text. If not, compare your class notes to the text at hand or review the text's place in the syllabus.

TAKING NOTES

Taking notes reinforces learning. It encourages selection of the main ideas and details in order to visualize the overall organization of the text. It also creates a shortened version of the text with all the essential information recorded for future exam review. Finally, it helps to improve concentration.

1. Finish reading each section before taking notes. Don't wait until the very end or jot something down for every sentence. Information that seems important at first glance may not be after reading the entire section.

2. Be very selective about what is recorded. When highlighting, try to underline about 15% of what you read.
3. Use your own words. Paraphrase succinctly.
4. Work quickly and effectively. Don't waste time.
5. Use organizational strategies such as symbols, color-coding, post-it flags, headings, hierarchical or numbered lists, etc.

ANOTHER WAY TO THINK ABOUT READING

The SQ5R study method is another system for active reading. Actively processing information improves comprehension and retention of the material. These steps are especially appropriate for textbook material you are studying for an exam.

SURVEY Before reading a chapter or passage, read the introduction and summary. Skim topic headings, bold-faced words, pictures, charts, and graphs to get an idea of the general structure and content before beginning reading.

QUESTION Formulate a purpose for the reading by developing questions from the topic and headings skimmed in the survey step. Ask who, what, where, when, why, and how questions: the best questions are general, covering main topics and important points.

READ Break the material into sections that take about 20 minutes to read and go section by section. Look for answers to your questions, key concepts, and supporting details. Study charts, graphs, tables, and pictures, which serve to present new information and tie together concepts from the reading.

RESPOND After each section, think about the material you have just read and answer the questions you have asked. This can be done during the reading step, since response is often automatic. The purpose of this step is to think about the material and take notice of what is important.

RECORD Go back, underline key concepts, and take notes. This can be done on a separate sheet of paper, on note cards, in the margins of the textbook, or any way that works well for you. (Do this after each section.)

RECITE Next, look away from the material, and try to recite the key information and ideas in your own words. Re-read the material, if necessary, until you are able to recall the most important points. This may be frustrating at first, but will lead to better understanding and save review time in the long run.

REVIEW After reading the entire chapter, scan and review the information aloud or in your head. Discuss the material with a classmate if possible. Identify overall themes and relationships between concepts. Revise notes or markings so they can be easily understood later.