

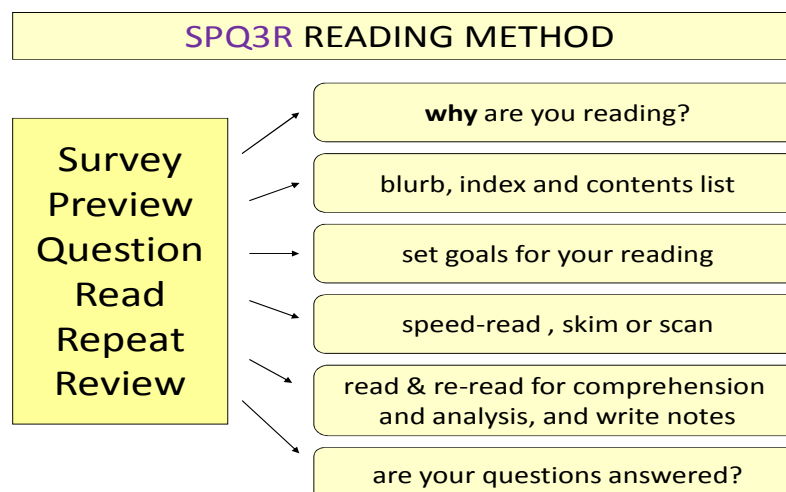
Reading



Source: <http://blog.prathambooks.org/2001>

Reading effectively is a vital skill at university. Being able to read large quantities of text and to select the relevant material from appropriate sources will enable you to use your research well and to incorporate it into your writing to best effect. You will also be required to approach your reading from a critical perspective.

1. Set clear targets for each reading session so that you can focus on a specific goal (or goals) to be achieved. You should always know **why** you are reading, so you can assess what you have accomplished at the end of each session. This will give you a clear framework for your reading task, help you to avoid distractions and keep you motivated. See *Reading Strategies*: ([skills4study, 2010](#))
2. Break up each reading task into clear stages, by using a method such as SQ3R or SPQ3R:



Survey: Are you looking for examples, definitions, case studies, theoretical analysis, background history, statistics, arguments for and against or alternative/similar points of view to your own?

Preview: Is this the right book for you? (For articles, read the Abstract.) Which are the relevant sections/pages?

Question: What are the questions you want answered?

Read: Check that this is the information you want.

Repeat: Check that you understand it fully (from a critical perspective, too: see 9-10 below) and record everything useful in a way which will be helpful to you later (see 7 below).

Review: Have you completed the task you set yourself? If not, go on to the next source. Has your reading thrown up any further questions? Note these down for the next reading task.

3. Plan ahead and be realistic about what you can achieve in the time available. Manage your time carefully. How many hours/days can you allow yourself for research? At what point must you decide that you have done enough reading?
4. Recognize and accept your limitations. Can you achieve your goals in a 1hr or 2hr session? How long can you read before you lose concentration? How often will you need to give yourself a break? (NB This may vary depending on the type of reading you are doing: general reading to get the gist of a text is less taxing than in-depth reading for detailed analysis.) See Cottrell (2008, pp116-18) for 'smart reader' ideas.
5. Ensure that conditions for reading are optimum to ensure maximum concentration/focus:
 - a. Do you have everything you need? (Dictionary? Source materials: books, articles, reference works? Pens, pencils, highlighters and notebook to make meaningful notes? Ambient music or silence? Drinking water to keep your brain hydrated?)
 - b. Will you be undisturbed? (Mobile/landline phone switched off? Family and friends notified of your unavailability? 'Keep Out' notice on your door?)
 - c. Are you reading in the right place for you? (In the Library? In your own study space?)
 - d. Are you physically comfortable? (Warm/cool enough? Not sleepy, tired or hungry?)
 - e. When is the best time of day for you? In-depth reading should be attempted only when you are at your most alert. Are you a night owl or an early bird?
6. Expand your horizons beyond your reading list. Use a **variety** of reading resources: books (printed and electronic: e-books), journal articles (printed and electronic: e-journals), academic websites, reports and conference papers, abstracts etc.. Ensure

you have covered a **range** of different approaches or viewpoints, so that you have a balanced and informed view of the topic or issues you are researching.

7. Keep an effective record of the important information you have gleaned from your reading. Ensure that you label any useful “quotations” clearly, with full bibliographical information and page numbers, to avoid plagiarism and to save you time if you need to find them again later.
8. Develop speed reading skills to tackle longer texts more efficiently, such as **scanning** (to find specific information by using **keywords**: names, numbers, facts; in text or in headings) and **skimming** (to understand the ‘**gist**’ of a text by using pictures, headings, the first line(s) of paragraphs, the introduction and conclusion). See the following resources:
 - a. Short Burst Learning (2005): <http://www.speedreadingcd.com/reading-test.htm> to find your current reading speed.
 - b. Doyle, D (2010) Glendale Community College: *Self Pacing Methods*: <http://english.glendale.cc.ca.us/methods.html> for 5 useful methods
9. **Read actively** by engaging with the text/author. Ask yourself questions about what you are reading. Do you understand what you have read? (Comprehension) Can you break down the text into its component parts and examine it from different points of view? (Analysis) are you convinced by the author’s arguments/evidence? How can you **use** this information?
10. **Read critically**:
 - a. What is the line of reasoning? What is/are the author’s conclusion(s)?
 - b. Can you evaluate an argument? Using what criteria?
 - c. Can you identify the evidence? Does it support the author’s conclusions?
 - d. Can you see the flaws in an argument? Are there any hidden assumptions, agenda or possible bias?
 - e. Be a detective: test the evidence – is it convincing? How does this text fit into the ‘bigger picture’ for this topic?
 - f. Be a lawyer: how could you use this information to support an argument for or against a particular point of view or theoretical standpoint?

The following [guide](http://www.ucs.edu/hsc/ebent/res/Guide%20to%20Reading%20Research.pdf) at <http://www.ucs.edu/hsc/ebent/res/Guide to Reading Research.pdf> has a list of questions to prompt you to critique methodology