



Academic reading



Academic reading often requires you to actively engage with, and critically think about the information you take in. There is a purpose behind what you're reading, and understanding this purpose frames how you interpret and use the information.

Rather than passively read information, reading academic sources and information encourages you to ask questions about what you're reading, and invites you to draw connections to existing knowledge.

As a university student you will be exposed to lengthy texts, some of which will contain unfamiliar terminology or complex concepts. However, as you develop your academic skills, reading academic material will become easier.

Types of reading materials at university:

- selected chapters from textbooks
- allocated weekly readings, usually from books or journals
- academic sources, such as peer-reviewed journals, reports, conference papers and theses
- discussion forums
- lecture slides, course notes and assessment criteria

Length of reading material

Some subjects require you to complete weekly readings, so knowing the purpose of the reading means you can determine which part of the information is relevant. Reading for assessments requires you to read widely, most likely on a specific topic or issue, so it's important to be selective when you're deciding what to read and whether it's relevant.

Reading strategies are a helpful way to make sense of information and manage lengthy, complex texts.

For example:

- break down large pieces of text into manageable sections
- take notes as you are reading (see Note-taking tip sheet)
- pause to absorb the information you have read (rehearse it in your mind)
- take regular breaks if you are reading longer pieces of information
- have a dictionary and a pen to underline words that you are not familiar with
- when reading a text for the first time, try to understand the main idea, rather than the individual words – don't let unfamiliar words prevent you from reading further
- do some background research on what you're reading
- draw on support to gain understanding of the context (lecturer / tutor notes, reviews of the text, discussion forums).



Selecting relevant sources to read and how to make sense of them

Many journal articles, academic sources and textbooks feature abstracts and summaries containing the text's main points, ideas and findings. These help to identify whether the information is relevant to your task. Another useful strategy is to observe titles, headings and subheadings, which define key areas.

With journal articles, it's important to note the year and details of publication, as this provides information on the relevance of the article. If you are reading for an assessment, identify how the source supports or relates to your assessment task. Similarly, if you're completing your weekly readings, try connecting the text to the learning outcomes, as this can help you locate and identify important information to inform your note-taking (see Note-taking tip sheet).

Managing difficult readings

Sometimes it's helpful to read the section again, underlining key areas or sentences that are not clear. Don't be put off by denser texts, as re-reading will often clarify the idea. Consider reading the first and last sentence to gather the main idea.

For weekly allocated readings, understanding the context and background can fill the gaps of your understanding. Textbooks often have learning objectives at the beginning of the chapter and questions at the end which you can use to consolidate your understanding. Finding contextual cues within the text, such as examples of comparisons, will also help you with make sense of the information. Sometimes it's more productive to take a break and come back to it later.

Active strategies to help you read:

- Ask yourself questions as you read – this allows you to draw connections, focus your attention and highlights what you need to learn
 - What is the relevance of this reading?
 - How does this relate to the topic/issue/or argument?
 - How can I use this information?
 - How can I connect this information to what I already know?
 - Is the information novel/contentious/unfounded?
- talk about what you have read to friends or family
- plan to do your course reading when you are most alert
- try using reading strategies – see our reading strategies table .

READING STRATEGY	BENEFIT	HOW?
Surveying (pre-reading)	Gain an overall idea of the text	Observe the publication details and the credibility of the author. Look at the title, author, date, headings, in-text references, diagrams, graphs, first/last sentence within each paragraph
	Filter unimportant or irrelevant information	Consider whether the text is relevant for the task – i.e. will it be suitable for the essay? Is this a required reading or recommended?
	Provides clues and sets up expectations about what you will read	
Skim reading	Find out main ideas and arguments of text without in-depth analysis	Start at the beginning, rapidly moving through the text
	Gain an understanding of the text, the <i>gist</i> of the piece	Read over paragraphs by looking for key words, concepts, people. You don't have to read word for word but make sure you have a general understanding. See if there is an abstract or summary section. Read the introduction and conclusion sections
Scanning	Way of locating specific information – key dates, key terms, definitions	After using the skim reading method to identify the section of importance, scan the text to find the specific term/piece of information and read this section only
	Locating quotes/supporting sources	Sometimes you will find the assessment criteria will provide you with key terms and ideas to help you identify specific information and whether the source will be relevant
	Helps with exam revision	
	Identifying concepts/ideas without extensive reading	
In-depth reading	Gain deeper meaning of text	After using the skim reading method to identify if this is a relevant source, break the text into sections (i.e. abstract, introduction, first paragraph). You can prepare by creating questions to ask yourself as you read. This will help provide you with context and purpose to inform your understanding
	Link ideas to other texts and to existing knowledge	Start with each section and read carefully
	Evaluate the validity of arguments; consider limitations of argument/idea	Write notes as you read
	Identify whether information will be relevant to assessments (i.e. evidence for an essay)	Re-read the text again to clarify your understanding and ensure that you can answer your pre-reading questions. After reading the section, you might even ask yourself questions about what you have read to help consolidate your understanding
	To help with exam revision	Relay ideas of what you've read to friends/family/colleagues

Helpful resources:

- OUA Tip Sheets: *Essay Writing, Referencing, Note-taking*
- [Smarthinking](#)