

Reading Skills

This lesson introduces a guide designed to help university students improve their academic reading skills. It encourages students to reflect on their reading challenges—like **time management, vocabulary, or understanding complex texts**. It also offers strategies and advice to overcome these issues.

The **"5-minute self-test"** mentioned in the paragraph is a quick activity for students to:

- Reflect on their current **reading habits** at university.
- Identify **specific difficulties** they face when reading academic texts (e.g., concentration, vocabulary, reading speed).
- **Tick** the challenges that apply to them from a list provided.

The goal is to raise awareness of personal reading struggles so they can start working on strategies to improve.

Introduction:

Reading at university can be hard, but many students don't think about how they read or how to get better at it. This sheet gives helpful advice and tips for different types of reading. Before using the tips, it's a good idea to think about how you read now and what you find difficult.

What you read at university:

You will read many types of texts like course packs, lecture slides, books, journal articles, websites, newspapers, research reports, and case studies.

Why you read at university:

You read to get ready for lectures, review lessons, do research for assignments, and study for exams.

What reading skills you need:

You need more than just understanding texts—you should also be able to analyze, evaluate, compare, and use the information in your work.

Effective reading: general advice

Here are some simple but important tips for effective reading:

- Choose a quiet, well-lit place with no distractions. Avoid reading in bed, or you might fall asleep.
- Don't read out loud—it slows you down and hurts your focus.
- Read when you can concentrate, and take short breaks every 30–45 minutes.
- Set clear reading goals, like finishing a chapter or a few pages.
- Reading may take more time than you think, so plan ahead and allow extra time.

Reading Strategy 1: Purposeful Reading

Don't just start reading without a plan. Before you begin, know *why* you're reading. Create a clear purpose by:

- **Refer to:** Looking at your assignments, lecture slides, or tutorial questions.
- **Create:** Making your own questions from lectures or from skimming the chapter (look at titles, headings, diagrams, intros, etc).
- **Consider:** Thinking about what you already know or have experienced.

Be specific about what you're looking for—like answers, explanations, arguments, or examples. Write your purpose down to stay focused.

Purposeful reading of this nature can help you read faster and more selectively. It can also help your concentration and your ability to remember.

Reading strategy 2: scanning

Scanning is reading quickly to search for specific information. You may not realise it, but you are already good at scanning. You scan, for example, when checking a TV guide or a phone book. Scanning may allow you to 'read' up to 1,500 words a minute.

In academic reading, scanning helps you find key terms to decide if the text is relevant to your research.

Reading Strategy 3: Skimming

Skimming means reading quickly to get a general idea of the text, allowing you to read up to 1,000 words per minute. It helps you decide if the text is worth reading in detail and where to start.

Before reading carefully, skim the text to check what you already know and set a purpose for your reading.

Skimming also helps you stay interested and improve your understanding.

You can skim by reading:

- Titles and subheadings
- Bold, italic, or underlined words
- Diagrams
- Abstracts, introductions, or conclusions
- The first sentence of each paragraph
- Chapter questions or summaries

Reading Strategy 4: Information Words

Sometimes, you need to read quickly but still understand the key points. This is where "surface reading" helps. In most textbooks, only about 50% of the words are "information words" (the essential ones), while the rest are connecting words that aren't crucial for meaning. By focusing on these key information words, you can read faster and understand better.

To identify these important words, pay attention to the main message the author is trying to convey, and the important words will naturally stand out.

Reading Strategy 5: Phrase Reading

When you watch someone read, you'll notice their eyes move in small stops called fixations. During these stops, the eyes focus on words.

Poor readers only focus on one or two words at a time (each fixation)

| This is | how a | poor | reader's | eyes move | along | lines | of print. |

Good readers, however, take in several words at once, which helps them read more quickly and efficiently. (each fixation)

| This is how | a better reader's | eyes move along | lines of print. |

Reading Strategy 6: Analytical Reading

Analytical reading is when you read carefully to fully understand and appreciate the material. You might read certain parts multiple times, pause to think, or take notes. This slower style of reading helps you better grasp the content, but your reading speed may drop below 100 words per minute.

Reading Strategy 7: Marking the Text

If you own the text, underline important words, highlight with a marker, or make notes in the margins. If you don't own it, use sticky notes. Marking the text helps you stay focused, find key points easily, and makes it easier to review the material later for assignments or exams.

Reading Strategy 8: Note-Taking

Note-taking is a valuable skill that helps you understand, remember, and prepare for exams. Here are 7 key principles to follow:

1. **Record publication details:** Always note the title, author, date, publisher, and page numbers for future reference.

2. **Preview the text:** Skim and scan the text first to understand what's important before taking notes.
3. **Keep notes in one place:** Use whatever system works for you—computer, notebooks, or flashcards—but make sure you can easily find them later.
4. **Paraphrase and summarize:** Write key ideas in your own words instead of copying text. This helps you understand better.
5. **Note your thoughts:** Include your own ideas, opinions, questions, and connections to other materials.
6. **Be creative:** Use different methods like diagrams, symbols, or colors to organize your notes and aid memory.
7. **Review your notes:** After taking notes, check if they are clear, accurate, and usable later, and ensure they include full references.

Reading Strategy 9: Managing Vocabulary

Even native English speakers can feel overwhelmed by new vocabulary. As a university student, it's important to build both general and subject-specific vocabulary. Use glossaries, dictionaries, and keep a list of new words. Write down their definitions and example sentences to understand how they're used.

When using a dictionary, be selective. Don't look up every word—sometimes you can guess the meaning based on context.

Reading Strategy 10: Reading with Others

Try studying with a partner or a group. Stay focused, and you'll benefit from sharing notes, asking questions, and explaining ideas to each other. This can help you understand, remember, and reflect on what you read.

Final Tip:

Reading at university is hard—but with practice and effort, it can become easier and even enjoyable!