Reading for Comprehension

Before Reading:

• Make a reading schedule- prioritize readings (usually the most important and/or hardest first), break a text up into manageable chunks, build in breaks and rewards
• Choose a productive time of day and create a distraction-free zone
• Know your purpose- what do you need to be able to do or know after this reading

Active Reading Strategies:

Preview

• Determine what the reading focuses on
• Look at your syllabus- does this reading fall under a heading/topic?
• Read Introductions and Conclusions. Note headings and sections, illustrations, bolded words, summaries, the genre

While Reading, Ask Critical Questions

• What are the main ideas and important topics? How do the concepts relate to one another?
• Examples: What differences exist between _____? How is _____ an example of _____? What are the features of _____? Do you agree that ____? Explain.

Relate to Prior Knowledge

• How does this reading relate to previous class assignments? To anything you already know about the topic? How does it connect to you?
• Ask why your professor may have assigned this reading.

Review

• Ask yourself about the main ideas. Answer any critical questions you have asked.
• Try to teach what you’ve learned to someone else. If you have gaps in your knowledge, go back over the material and fill them in.
• Create an outline of the text from memory. Make a concept map of what you’ve learned.

SQ3R Method

• Survey: Read the title, headings, outlines, any bolded words, the introduction and conclusion.
• Question: Turn each heading into a question.
• Read: Read through paragraphs/sections to answer your questions. Add more questions if needed.
• Recite: Without looking at your notes/textbook, recite aloud the answer to your question at the end of each section. Repeat until you get them correct.
• Review/Reflect: After you’ve read the whole chapter, go back and try to recite the answers to each of your questions. Also, find connections between the questions and the overall reading/course topic. Write a 1-2 sentence reflection summary.

Taking Notes

• Enter into a dialogue with the author(s).
• Use your own words; never copy directly from the text.

Note-Taking Strategies

• Read a paragraph or section, then write down, in your own words, a summary of the main concepts of what you’ve just read in the margins or on a separate note sheet. If needed, provide 2-3 key details or examples/non-examples for each concept.
• Write down any questions you have about the concept or any ideas you still don’t understand. Identify and define unfamiliar terms.

Annotating
• Develop a system that helps you track key words, unfamiliar words/ideas you don’t understand, important information, connections between ideas.
• Can use color coding, symbols, colored sticky tabs, sticky notes with main ideas for each chapter, etc.; use the left/right columns strategically.
• Use the same system each time you read so that you become familiar with it.

The Cornell Method
• Divide a paper into 3 sections: a blank section 2 inches from the bottom, then divide the top by one-third to the left and two-thirds to the right.
• Make notes in the top right section while reading. List main ideas/key words in the top left section shortly after you’ve read. Later, write a brief overall summary at the bottom.

The “What it says” and “What it does” Method
• Read a paragraph/section. In one sentence, summarize what it says.
• Think about what it does—what is the paragraph’s purpose in the text (does it provide an example of a main idea, does it introduce an opposing view, etc.). In one sentence, summarize what it does.

Highlighting/Underlining
• Writing notes in the margin is more effective. When you feel the urge to highlight something, write instead: summarize the text, ask questions, agree or disagree with the author.
• If you must highlight: only highlight AFTER you’ve read the paragraph/section. Go back and highlight the main ideas. Making these choices leads to deeper processing.
• Highlight as minimally as possible—key words, phrases, etc.

Skimming:
Is Useful when: you just need to know the big picture; you are conducting research (so you can determine if a text will be useful to you); you simply don’t have time to do a full reading.
Is Not Useful when: you need to know details; you don’t understand a subject very well; you are reading novels, short stories, or biblical texts.

How to Skim:
• Be strategic, focused, intentional, and selective.
• Read introductions and conclusions. Read the first and last sentences of paragraphs. Look over bold words and text features.
• Read only enough of a paragraph to know if it is important to you or contains a main idea. Look for words that will clue you in to where the author is headed (ex. however, although, in conclusion...).
• Skim the table of contents of a book and only read what you need for the task at hand.

Bibliography and resources for further reading:
https://www.esc.edu/online-writing-center/resources/critical-reading-writing/general-reading/interpreting-texts-asking-questions/
https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/using-highlighters/
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