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.

Before you Begin 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
Taking Notes

- Enter into a dialogue with the author(s).
- Use your own words; never copy directly from the text.
- Try one of the following methods or combine them for your use:

**Paragraph Review**
- 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.

**Sources and Useful Resources**

- [https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/using-highlighters/](https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/using-highlighters/)
- [https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/reading-textbooks-effectively/](https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/reading-textbooks-effectively/)
- [https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/taking-notes-while-reading/](https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/taking-notes-while-reading/)
- [http://fsn.conell.edu/notes2.html](http://fsn.conell.edu/notes2.html)
- [https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/active-reading-strategies](https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/active-reading-strategies)
- [https://medium.goodnotes.com/study-with-ease-the-best-way-to-take-notes-2749a3e8297b](https://medium.goodnotes.com/study-with-ease-the-best-way-to-take-notes-2749a3e8297b)
- [https://www.ucd.ie/academic_support/online_study_skills_workshops/503R_improving_reading_comprehension.html](https://www.ucd.ie/academic_support/online_study_skills_workshops/503R_improving_reading_comprehension.html)