UNIT 2: READING SKILLS

English Degree Entrance Preparation compiled by Carrie Molinski & Sue Slessor.

Please visit the web version of *English for Degree Entrance Preparation* (https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/englishdegreeentranceprep/) to access the complete book, interactive activities and videos.

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READING STRATEGIES

Introduction

Why are reading skills important? Well, first off, you will be reading a lot throughout your post-secondary career. Ever read an entire chapter of a textbook only to go to class the next day and have completely forgotten what you read? Developing proper reading strategies will help you retain the information you read, so you will not have to go back and re-read constantly.

Additionally, depending on the kind of job you have, you may also have to do a lot of reading very quickly; for instance, if your job requires any kind of research you will have to sort through hundreds of pages of text in a quick and efficient way. Even outside of your career, you will have to spend time reading emails, letters, manuals if you buy a new appliance or car, and other important documents. The bottom line is that investing in developing proper reading skills now will serve you in both your career and personal life because you will become a more efficient reader.

In this module, you will be provided with a series of reading techniques. As you read, try to think about which methods you have tried in the past, or ones you may wish to try in the future.

Learning Objectives

- Identify a variety of reading strategies including the SQ4R method, annotating, skimming, and scanning.
- Explain how our environment impacts our ability to read.

To Do List

- Read "Consider your Reading Environment" in *Student Success*.
- Read "Critical Reading Skills" in *Student Success*.
- Watch the videos on the SQ4R method.
- Read "Navigating Textbooks" in *Student Success*.
- Watch the videos on annotating, skimming, and scanning.
- Complete the Reading Skills Assignment in Blackboard.

Attribution & References

CONSIDER YOUR READING ENVIRONMENT

Now that you've worked up an attitude for success and are feeling motivated, it's time to get organized. You need to organize both your space and your time. This is an essential part of good study skills. It starts with a good studying environment.

Tips for Effective, Individual Study Spaces

Most students more or less take what they can get when it comes to study areas. Schools usually offer a variety of nooks and crannies for students to hunker down and get their assignments done. The school library is a good (and quiet) place. Many common areas elsewhere on campus have tables, chairs, couches, and lounges to accommodate learners. But most students end up doing the majority of their out-of-class work at home.

A messy desk might not be the best for studying. **Source:** Image by OpenClipart-Vectors, used under Pixabay License

Home environments may be limited in terms of providing all of the recommended aspects of a good study space, but many of the recommendations can be either implemented or adapted from what a student has on hand or what can be improvised no matter what environment they are living in. Elements conducive to a more effective study/homework experience include such things as good lighting, ample supplies, comfortable seating, adequate space, organization, and personalizing the study area to add a touch of inspiration and motivation.

Space is important for many reasons—some obvious, some less so. People's moods, attitudes, and levels of work productivity change in different spaces. Learning to use space to your own advantage helps get you off to a good start in your studies. Here are a few of the ways space matters:

- **Everyone needs their own space.** This may seem simple, but everyone needs some physical area, regardless of size, that is really their own—even if it's only a small part of a shared space. Within your own space, you generally feel more secure and in control.
- **Physical space reinforces habits.** For example, using your bed primarily for sleeping makes it easier to fall asleep there than elsewhere. It is a bad choice for studying as you are in the habit of relaxing and going to sleep there, so it's harder to stay alert and focused.
- **Different places create different moods.** While this may seem obvious, students don't always use

places to their best advantage. One place may be bright and full of energy, with happy students passing through and enjoying themselves—a place that puts you in a good mood. But that may actually make it more difficult to concentrate on your studying. Yet the opposite—a totally quiet, austere place devoid of color and sound and pleasant decorations—can be just as unproductive if it makes you associate studying with something unpleasant. You will need to discover what space works best for you and then let that space reinforce good study habits.

Use Space to Your Advantage and to Avoid Distractions

Begin by analyzing your needs, preferences, and past problems with places for studying. Where do you usually study? What are the best things about that place for studying? What distractions are most likely to occur there?

The goal is to find, or create, the best place for studying, and then to use it regularly so that studying there becomes a good habit.

- **Choose a place you can associate with studying.** Make sure it's not a place already associated with other activities (eating, watching television, sleeping, etc.). Over time, the more often you study in this space, the stronger will be its association with studying, so that eventually you'll be completely focused as soon as you reach that place and begin.
- **Your study area should be available whenever you need it.** If you want to use your home, apartment, or dorm room but you never know if another person may be there and possibly distract you, then it's probably better to look for another place, such as a study lounge or an area in the library. Look for locations open at the hours when you may be studying. You may also need two study spaces—one in or near where you live, another on campus. Sometimes you have to make do depending on circumstances. For example, you have an hour free between two classes, and your regular study areas are too far away to use for only an hour. Look for a convenient study place nearby such as a cafeteria or student lounge.

Choose a pleasant, quiet place for studying, such as the school library. **Source:** "Students Study in 4 West" by clemsonunivlibrary, licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

- **Your study space should meet your study needs.** An open desk or table surface usually works best for writing, and you'll tire quickly if you try to write notes sitting in an easy chair (which might also make you sleepy). You need good light for reading, to avoid tiring from eyestrain. If you use a laptop for writing notes or reading and researching, you need a power outlet so you don't have to stop when your battery runs out.
- **Your study space should meet your psychological needs.** Some students may need total silence with absolutely no visual distractions; they may find a perfect study carrel hidden away on the fifth floor in the library. Other students may be unable to concentrate for long without looking up from reading and momentarily letting their eyes move over a pleasant scene. Some students may find it easier to stay motivated when surrounded by other students also studying; they may find an open space in the library or a study lounge with many tables spread out over an area. Experiment to find the setting that works best for you—and remember that the more often you use *this same space*, the more comfortable and effective your studying will become.
- **You may need the support of others to maintain your study space.** Students living at home, whether with a spouse and children or with their parents, often need the support of family members to maintain an effective study space. The kitchen table probably isn't best if others pass by frequently. Be creative, if necessary, and set up a card table in a quiet corner of your bedroom or elsewhere to avoid interruptions. Put a "do not disturb" sign on your door.
- **Keep your space organized and free of distractions.** You want to prevent sudden impulses to neaten up the area (when you should be studying), do laundry, wash dishes, and so on. Unplug a nearby telephone, turn off your cell phone, and use your computer only as needed for studying. If your email or message program pops up a notice every time an email or message arrives, turn off your notifications, turn off your Wi-Fi, or detach the network cable to prevent those intrusions.
- **Plan for breaks.** Everyone needs to take a break occasionally when studying. Think about the space you're in and how to use it when you need a break. If in your home, stop and do a few exercises to get your blood flowing. If in the library, take a walk up a couple flights of stairs and around the stacks before returning to your study area.
- **Prepare for human interruptions.** Even if you hide in the library to study, there's a chance a friend may happen by. At home with family members or in a dorm room or common space, the odds increase greatly. Have a plan ready in case someone pops in and asks you to join them in some fun activity. Know when you plan to finish your studying so that you can make a plan for later—or for tomorrow at a set time.

The Distractions of Technology

Multitasking is the term commonly used for being engaged in two or more different activities at the same time, usually referring to activities using devices such as cell phones, smartphones, computers, and so on.

Many people claim to be able to do as many as four or five things simultaneously, such as writing an email while responding to an instant message (IM) and reading a tweet, all while watching a video on their computer monitor or talking on the phone. Many people who have grown up with computers consider this kind of multitasking a normal way to get things done, including studying. Even people in business sometimes speak of multitasking as an essential component of today's fast-paced world.

Watch It: Why the Human Brain Can't Multitask

Watch Why the human brain can't multitask (length 2:39) on YouTube (https://youtu.be/BpD3PxrgICU)

It is true that *some* things can be attended to while you're doing something else, such as checking email while you watch television news—but only when none of those things demands your full attention. You can concentrate 80 percent on the email, for example, while 20 percent of your attention is listening for something on the news that catches your attention. Then you turn to the television for a minute, watch that segment, and go back to the email. But you're not actually watching the television *at the same time that* you're composing the email—you're rapidly going back and forth. In reality, the mind can focus only on one thing at any given moment. Even things that don't require much thinking are severely impacted by multitasking, such as driving while talking on a cell phone or texting. An astonishing number of people end up in the emergency room from just trying to walk down the sidewalk while texting; it is a common occurrence for people to walk into a pole or parked car while multitasking.

"Okay," you might be thinking, "why should it matter if I write my paper first and then answer emails or do them back and forth at the same time?" **It actually takes you longer to do two or more things at the same time than if you do them separately**—at least with anything that you actually have to focus on, such as studying. That's true because each time you go back to studying after looking away to a message or tweet, it takes time for your mind to shift gears to get back to where you were. Every time your attention shifts, add up some more "downtime"—and pretty soon it's evident that multi-tasking is costing you a lot more time than you think. And that's assuming that your mind *does* fully shift back to where you were every time, without losing your train of thought or forgetting an important detail. It doesn't always.

The other problem with multi-tasking is the effect it can have on the attention span—and even on how the brain works. Research has shown that in people who constantly shift their attention from one thing to another in short bursts, the brain forms patterns that make it more difficult to keep sustained attention on

any one thing. So, when you really do need to concentrate for a while on one thing, such as when studying for a big test, it becomes more difficult to do even if you're not multitasking at that time. It's as if your mind makes a habit of wandering from one thing to another and then can't stop.

So, stay away from multitasking whenever you have something important to do, like studying. If it's already a habit for you, don't let it become worse. Manipulate your study space to prevent the temptations altogether. Turn your computer off—or shut down email and messaging programs if you need the computer for studying. Turn your cell phone off—if you just tell yourself not to answer it but still glance at it each time to see who sent or left a message, you're still losing your studying momentum and have to start over again. For those who are really addicted to technology (you know who you are!), go to the library and don't take your laptop or cell phone.

Some students use effective time management strategies, including scheduling breaks in your study periods, usually for a few minutes every hour. If you're really hooked on checking for messages, plan to do that at scheduled times.

What about listening to music while studying? Some don't consider that multitasking, and many students say they can listen to music without it affecting their studying. Studies are inconclusive about the positive or negative effects of music on people's ability to concentrate, probably because so many different factors are involved. But there's a huge difference between listening to your favourite CD and spontaneously singing along with some of the songs and enjoying soft background music that enhances your study space the same way as good lighting and pleasant decor. Some people can study better with low-volume instrumental music that relaxes them and does not intrude on their thinking, while others can concentrate only in silence. And some are so used to being immersed in music and the sounds of life that they find *total* silence more distracting—such people can often study well in places where people are moving around. The key thing is to be honest with yourself: if you're *actively* listening to music while you're studying, then you're likely not studying as well as you could be. It will take you longer and lead to less successful results.

Family and Roommate Issues

Multitasking makes studying much less effective. Try to find a learning environment that is free of distractions. **Source:** "Multitasking" by Benton Greene, licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Sometimes going to the library or elsewhere is not practical for studying, and you have to find a way to cope in a shared space.

Part of the solution is time management. Agree with others on certain times that will be reserved for studying; agree to keep the place quiet, not to have guests visiting, and to prevent other distractions. These arrangements can be made with a roommate, spouse, and older children. If there are younger children in your household and you have child-care responsibility, it's usually more complicated. You may have to schedule your studying during their nap time or find quiet

activities for them to enjoy while you study. Try to spend some time with your kids before you study, so they don't feel like you're ignoring them.

The key is to plan ahead. You don't want to find yourself, the night before an exam, in a place that offers no space for studying.

Finally, accept that sometimes you'll just have to say no. If your roommate or a friend often tries to engage you in conversation or suggests doing something else when you need to study, just say no. Learn to be firm but polite as you explain that you just *really* have to get your work done first. Students who live at home may also have to learn how to say no to parents or family members—just be sure to explain the importance of the studying you need to do. Remember, you can't be everything to everyone all the time.

Check Your Understanding: Learning Environment—Home Study Area

1. Consider your current study area at home—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Be thorough.
2. List as many ways you think you can realistically improve, change, or start from scratch with your study area. Remember, you might not have the advantage of a whole room, or even a corner of a room, but there are still some changes you can make to create a more effective study environment.

Attribution & References

NAVIGATING TEXTBOOKS

Often when presented with the textbook for a course, you may find it a little overwhelming. The textbook can be large with a lot of information in it. Students can feel a little defeated even before they start. They may have questions like, "Will I need to know everything in this book?" or "Will I be able to understand it?" or even "When will I have time to read all this?" Rest assured, it is likely much better than it might seem at first. Often you are only asked to read and deal with certain parts of the textbook, as opposed to the whole thing, so make sure to read your instructions carefully. Many students have ended up reading chapters that weren't required for the course.

Furthermore, there are many strategies that are helpful for navigating your textbook. Knowing the layout of your text can help you locate information easily, identify important information, and aid in reviewing and summarizing material. Here are some useful tips.

Front and Back Matter

Before diving into every line of text in a textbook reading assignment, it is helpful (and saves time) to find out first what resources the entire book has to offer you. Then, as those chapter readings are assigned, it helps to first skim read them for the big picture meaning.

The first exercise in this chapter will help you find all the resources in your textbook, and some textbooks have a lot more help in the front matter and back matter of the text than you may realize. One student who, when given this exercise to use on any textbook he had with him, picked his math book. He was at that time re-taking that math class because he had failed it the term before. As he did the exercise, he realized the back matter of the book included an answer key for half of the problems for every exercise. "Had I known this last term," he said, "I would have passed!" He would have been able to check his answers and see when he didn't understand a concept. See if you, too, find something useful in your textbook that perhaps you didn't know was there, either.

The exercises in this chapter cover strategies for skim-reading specific chapters and a strategy for getting the most out of graphics included in textbooks.

Front and Back Matter of a Textbook

Here is a list of several kinds of resources typically in the front of a textbook, known as “front matter,” and a list of typical “back matter” resources. Check one of your textbooks to see how many of these elements are present.
Textbook title:

Front Matter

- Table of Contents
- Preface
- Introduction
- To the Teacher
- To the Student
- Other (list, here):

Back Matter

- Glossary of Terms
- Index of subjects
- Answer Keys
- Additional Exercises
- Additional Readings
- Tables, graphs, charts
- Maps
- Other (list, here):

Annotating Strategies

Watch It: Critical Reading Strategies

Watch Critical Reading Strategies (7 minutes) on YouTube (https://youtu.be/jJPea7Ogy6w)

Skim-Reading Textbook Chapters

Before doing a detailed reading of a textbook chapter, get the big picture by following these steps:

- Similar to reading the Table of Contents for the entire book, read the Introduction or Chapter Overview, whichever the textbook features, for the main ideas and how they are divided.
- Read the headings and subheadings.
- Note the graphics (charts, tables, illustrations, etc.).
- Read the first one or two sentences in the paragraphs (the paragraph topic is sometimes covered in more than one sentence).
- Read the last sentence in each paragraph, which might be a paragraph summary.
- Read the summary of the entire chapter, if given.
- Read any sentence with boldface or italicized words or word groups in it (usually key ideas or technical terms).
- Stop when necessary if you come across a complicated idea or topic and take a little more time to skim it until you understand it.
- Skim the study questions, too. They will help you focus on key points.

Watch It: Skimming & Scanning

Watch It: Skimming & Scanning (Text Version)

Watch the following videos to learn more about skimming and scanning reading strategies:

Watch Reading strategy: Skimming (7 minutes) on YouTube (https://youtu.be/u5-EIeXskOs)

Watch Reading strategy: Scanning (6 minutes) on YouTube (https://youtu.be/Dy69pPGDeIg)

Reading Graphics

Graphics provide a visual way of conveying information. Listed below are various types of data found on most graphics, whether a pie chart, bar graph, line chart, or other type.

The key to comprehending graphics and using them to get more meaning from a textbook chapter or an article, or to answer study questions, is to pay close attention to the typical elements of the graphic. A graphic may include the following elements:

Graphics convey information visually. **Source:** Photo by 200 Degrees, used under Pixabay License

- Title
- Captions
- Legend
- Axis information (vertical information, or "Y" data, and horizontal information, or "X" data)
- Publication date (important for the most current information)
- Publisher (important for credibility)
- Labels
- Color (used to differentiate and compare data)
- Size (also used to represent comparisons)
- Spatial positions (helps for comparing and contrasting)
- Patterns represented by the content itself

- Trends that appear more evident when viewing the visual representation of the data

Anatomy of a Textbook

Good textbooks are designed to help you learn, not just to present information. They differ from other types of academic publications intended to present research findings, advance new ideas, or deeply examine a specific subject. Textbooks have many features worth exploring because they can help you understand your reading better and learn more effectively. In your textbooks, look for the elements listed in the table below.

Textbook sections

Textbook Feature	What It Is	Why You Might Find It Helpful
Preface or Introduction	A section at the beginning of a book in which the author or editor outlines its purpose and scope, acknowledges individuals who helped prepare the book, and perhaps outlines the features of the book.	You will gain perspective on the author's point of view, what the author considers important. If the preface is written with the student in mind, it will also give you guidance on how to "use" the textbook and its features.
Foreword	A section at the beginning of the book, often written by an expert in the subject matter (different from the author) endorsing the author's work and explaining why the work is significant.	A foreword will give you an idea about what makes this book different from others in the field. It may provide hints as to why your instructor selected the book for your course.
Author Profile	A short biography of the author illustrating the author's credibility in the subject matter.	This will help you understand the author's perspective and what the author considers important. It will also give you an idea about the author's credibility on the topic.
Table of Contents	A listing of all the chapters in the book and, in most cases, primary sections within chapters.	The table of contents is an outline of the entire book. It will be very helpful in establishing links among the text, the course objectives, and the syllabus. It's also a quick reference to finding specific chapters.
Chapter Preview or Learning Objectives	A section at the beginning of each chapter in which the author outlines what will be covered in the chapter and what the student should expect to know or be able to do at the end of the chapter.	These sections are invaluable for determining what you should pay special attention to. Be sure to compare these outcomes with the objectives stated in the course syllabus. They are also a good reference for review before a test.
Introduction	The first paragraph(s) of a chapter, which states the chapter's objectives and key themes. An introduction is also common at the beginning of primary chapter sections.	Introductions to chapters or sections are "must reads" because they give you a road map to the material you are about to read, pointing you to what is truly important in the chapter or section.
Applied Practice Elements	Exercises, activities, or drills designed to let students apply their knowledge gained from the reading. Some of these features may be presented via websites designed to supplement the text.	These features provide you with a great way to confirm your understanding of the material. If you have trouble with them, you should go back and reread the section. They also have the additional benefit of improving your recall of the material.
Chapter Summary	A section at the end of a chapter that confirms key ideas presented in the chapter.	It is a good idea to read this section before you read the body of the chapter. It will help you strategize about where you should invest your reading effort. It is also invaluable when reviewing for a test.
Review Material	A section at the end of the chapter that includes additional applied practice exercises, review questions, and suggestions for further reading.	The review questions will help you confirm your understanding of the material.

Textbook Feature	What It Is	Why You Might Find It Helpful
Glossary of Terms	Textbooks often highlight or bold new terms. Glossaries are usually at the back of textbooks and give definitions and explanations of important terms in the text.	Many students overlook the usefulness of glossaries. They aid comprehension when you are reading and come across terms you don't know or don't remember the meaning of. They are also extremely useful when doing assignments and the question is unclear or you are looking for clues in order to proceed.
Index	Located in the back matter of a text, it gives page numbers that content is located in.	This is probably one of the most useful, yet most underused sections of a text. Anytime you need to look up a concept in the text, don't waste time flipping through the text looking for a section you're sure you'll recognize. Go straight to the index and it will lead you directly to what you're looking for. It is especially useful when doing assignments.
Answer Keys	Many exercises in the text have answer keys or partial answer keys at the back of the book (or at the back of individual chapters).	Whenever doing exercises or practice problems, make sure you are doing them correctly by continually checking your answers. It's important to know if you're on the right track.
Additional Exercises	Many texts offer extra practice.	For topics that you don't feel you have a firm understanding in, extra practice helps solidify concepts.
Additional Readings and Resources	Additional resources offer extra information about topics.	These are useful if you want more information for your own interest, or if you are doing an assignment or research paper on one of the topics from your textbook.
Endnotes and Bibliographies	Formal citations of sources used to prepare the text.	These will help you infer the author's biases and are also valuable if doing further research on the subject for a paper.

Why and How to Read the Textbook

You probably already know that you should read your textbooks. However, if you are like many students, reading textbooks might take second place to other priorities, such as attending class and completing assignments. Perhaps it may not seem clear how committing time to weekly reading will support you in achieving your learning goals. But there are strong reasons for committing to regular reading.

Reading textbooks helps you get the most out of your class time. This is especially true if you are able to read your textbook before going to class. Why? Because if you are hearing a lot of material in a lecture for the very first time, it can often be difficult to take good notes and understand how all of the concepts fit together. If you read your textbook before you go to class, you will already have a general understanding of the most important topics in that unit. You will already know some of the key words, and you will have a good idea of what you already understand well and what you might not quite understand yet. That way, when you go to class, your instructor's lecture will support and strengthen the things that you're already

starting to learn. You'll be equipped to ask good questions and to participate well in class. Overall, you will get more out of the time you spend in class.

You become a better reader by reading. Learning to read textbooks well prepares you to read other complex material that you will encounter throughout your studies and later on in your career. Reading efficiently is a skill that you will use throughout your life—not just in your current classes.

Author's Story: Using the Index

I can't count the number of times the following scenario has played out.

A student comes to me exasperated. The student is trying to complete a homework assignment question but can't find the relevant information in the textbook that would help with the question. The student starts flipping through the pages of the text saying they've looked everywhere for the information but can't find it. They are either convinced it's not there, or they insist they've seen it in there before but now it's nowhere to be found. They continually flip as they explain how frustrated they are.

I ask them what they are looking for. They explain. I use the key words that they used to explain and look up those key words in the index of the textbook. It gives the page numbers of all the places in the text that are referenced to these key concepts. I choose the one that is in the chapter that they are currently working on. Then there it is. They are so amazed, and yet this is just the simple concept of remembering to use the index—a wonderful feature in the back matter of the textbook!

—Mary Shier, College of the Rockies

When you engage in reading your textbook, think about the following seven reading principles.

The Seven Reading Principles

Read the assigned material. I know this sounds like a no-brainer, but you might be surprised to learn how many students don't read the assigned material. Often, it takes longer to read the material than anticipated. Sometimes it is not interesting material to us and we procrastinate reading it. Sometimes we're busy and it is just not a priority. It makes it difficult to learn the information your instructor wants you to learn if you do not read about it before coming to class.

Read it when assigned. This is almost as big a problem for students as the first principle. You will benefit exponentially from reading assignments when they are assigned (which usually means reading them before the instructor lectures on them). If there is a date for a reading on your syllabus, finish reading it before that

date. The background knowledge you will attain from reading the information will help you learn and connect information when your instructor lectures on it, and it will leave you better prepared for class discussions. Further, if your instructor assigns you 70 pages to read by next week, don't wait until the night before to read it all. Break it down into chunks. Try scheduling time each day to read ten or so pages. It takes discipline and self-control but doing it this way will make understanding and remembering what you read much easier.

Take notes when you read. Hermann Ebbinghaus is a researcher who determined that 42% of information we take in is lost after only 20 minutes without review. For the same reasons that it's important to take notes during lectures, it's important to take notes when you are reading. Your notes will help you concentrate, remember and review.

Relate the information to you. We remember information that we deem is important. The strategy then is to make what you are studying important to you. Find a way to directly relate what you are studying to something in your life. Sometimes it is easy and sometimes it is not. But if your attitude is "I will never use this information" and "it's not important," chances are good that you will not remember it.

Read with a dictionary or use an online dictionary. Especially with information that is new to us, we may not always recognize all the words in a textbook or their meanings. If you read without a dictionary and you don't know what a word means, you probably still won't know what it means when you finish reading. Students who read with a dictionary (or who look the word up online) expand their vocabulary and have a better understanding of the text. Take the time to look up words you do not know. Another strategy is to try to determine definitions of unknown words by context, thus eliminating the interruption to look up words.

Ask a classmate or instructor when you have questions or if there are concepts you do not understand. Visiting instructors during their office hours is one of the most underutilized college resources. Some students may be shy about going, which is understandable, but ultimately, it's your experience, and it's up to you if you want to make the most of it. If you go, you will get answers to your questions; at the same time, you'll demonstrate to your instructor that their course is important to you. Find out when your professor's office hours are (they are often listed in the syllabus), ask before or after class or email your professor to find out. Be polite and respectful.

Read it again. Some students will benefit from reading the material a second or third time, as it allows them to better understand the material. The students who understand the material the best usually score the highest on exams. It may be especially helpful to reread the chapter just after the instructor has lectured on it.

Reading your textbook and knowing how to navigate your textbook and use it as a useful resource can make a significant difference in your learning. You will discover that textbooks are your friends.

Watch It: Reading Assignments

Watch Reading assignments: Crash Course study skills #2 (10 minutes) on YouTube (https://youtu.be/WAIUkjsZ5xQ)

Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this section is adapted from "5.3 Navigate Textbooks" In *Student Success* by Mary Shier, licensed under CC BY 4.0./ An adaptation of:

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CRITICAL READING SKILLS

Reading for joy and learning. **Source:** Photo by Hermann Traube, used under Pixabay License

Learning to read critically is an important part of developing good study habits, and ultimately strong reading skills will enhance almost every area of your life.

Most students entering college have not yet dealt with the level of difficulty involved in reading—and comprehending—scholarly textbooks and articles. The challenge may even surprise some who have pretty good reading and comprehension skills so far. Other students for whom reading has mostly consisted of social media, texts, forum chat rooms, and emails, find they are intimidated by the sheer amount of reading there is in college classes.

What is Reading Comprehension?

Reading comprehension is defined as the level of understanding of a message. In other words, how well do you understand what you read? This understanding comes from the interaction between the words that are written and how they trigger knowledge outside the written message. Comprehension is a "creative, multi-faceted process" dependent upon four language skills: phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Proficient reading depends on the ability to recognize words quickly and effortlessly. It is also determined by an individual's cognitive development, which is "the construction of thought processes". Reading comprehension involves both the ability to decode (figure out) words (i.e., know what the words are) and also the ability to make meaning of the words strung together (comprehension). Some people learn through education or instruction and others through direct experiences.

There are specific traits that determine how successfully an individual will comprehend text, including prior knowledge about the subject, well-developed language, and the ability to make inferences. Having the skill to monitor comprehension is a factor: "Why is this important?" and "Do I need to read the entire text?" are examples. Another trait is the ability to be self-correcting, which allows for solutions to comprehension challenges.

Vocabulary

Reading comprehension and vocabulary are inextricably linked. The ability to decode or identify and

pronounce words is self-evidently important, but knowing what the words mean has a major and direct effect on knowing what any specific passage means. Students with a smaller vocabulary than other students comprehend less of what they read, and it has been suggested that the most impactful way to improve comprehension is to improve vocabulary.

Most words are learned gradually through a wide variety of environments: television, books, and conversations. Some words are more complex and difficult to learn, such as homonyms (words that have multiple meanings) and those with figurative meanings, like idioms, similes, and metaphors.

Reciprocal Teaching

Reciprocal teaching requires students to predict, summarize, clarify, and ask questions for sections of a text. The use of strategies like summarizing after each paragraph have come to be seen as effective strategies for building students' comprehension. The idea is that students will develop stronger reading comprehension skills on their own if the teacher gives them explicit mental tools for unpacking text.

Instructional Conversations

"Instructional conversations", or comprehension through discussion, creates higher-level thinking opportunities for students by promoting critical and aesthetic thinking about the text. There are several types of questions to focus on: remembering; testing understanding; application or solving; synthesis or creating; and evaluation and judging. It is helpful to use these types of questions through "think-alouds" before, during, and after reading a text. When a student can relate a passage to an experience, another book, or other facts about the world, they are "making a connection". Making connections helps students understand the author's purpose in a fiction or non-fiction story.

Instructional conversations create higher-level thinking opportunities for students. **Source:** "Classroom help" by Mary Shier is licensed under CC BY 4.0.

Text Factors

There are factors that, once discerned, make it easier for the reader to understand the written text. One is the genre, like folktales, historical fiction, biographies or poetry. Each genre has its own characteristics for text

structure that, once understood, help the reader comprehend it. A story is composed of a plot, characters, setting, point of view, and theme. Informational books provide real world knowledge for students and have unique features such as: headings, maps, vocabulary, and an index. Poems are written in different forms and the most commonly used are: rhymed verse, haiku, free verse, and narratives. Poetry uses devices such as: alliteration, repetition, rhyme, metaphors, and similes. Students who are familiar with genres, organizational patterns, and text features in books they read are better able to create those text factors in their own writing.

The SQ3R Strategy

The SQ3R method has been a popular method of reading to learn. Textbooks require different reading methods than you might use for a novel, magazine, or website. When you approach a textbook, you are using it as a tool to learn the material that you need to know for your course. To achieve your aims, you will want to read with a purpose. One method for reading purposefully is called SQ3R. The acronym SQ3R reminds you of the elements of this reading method—Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review—that will help you become a more effective reader.

Source: "SQ3R Strategy" by Rawia Inaim is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

Survey

Before diving in to read the chapter, look over some of the key aspects.

- Survey the title: think about what you may already know about that topic.
- Survey the introduction: it gives you an idea about how the chapter is organized, and what you will be learning. If your chapter includes a list of Learning Objectives, you will want to pay particular attention to these. The Learning Objectives outline the key content you will want to master as a result of your reading.
- Survey anything in bold: subtitles are labels. Other bolded items may be definitions that you will need to know.
- Survey the pictures, charts and graphs: glance at these to pick out things that seem interesting or informative.
- Survey the summary at the end: this will review and give you the key points in the chapter.
- Survey the questions at the end of the chapter: these will help focus your attention on the main points.
- Survey your course syllabus/course presentation and see what topics the instructor is focusing on.

Question

When you have completed your survey, you will begin reading, focusing especially on items that you identified as important when you survey. Think of questions you would like to see answered in the chapter. Think of "Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How", the five W's and H questions, for each subtitle or definition (you can do this as you progress through the reading). These questions will become the headings in your notes.

Read

Read the chapter. Read to answer the questions you have created. Reread captions under pictures, graphs, and visuals. Note all underlined, italicized, and bolded words or phrases. Stop and reread parts that aren't clear. Once you have found the key information needed, move to the next step.

Recite

Recite the answer to your question out loud. Do this as if you are explaining to a study partner. Better yet, actually explain it to a study partner, family member, or friend who is interested in supporting you. Explaining it to someone else helps you understand it better yourself.

- After reciting, write this information down.
- Repeat this step for each question that you created.

Review

Stand back and look at the chapter as a whole.

- How do the ideas and facts you learned from each subsection fit together?
- Review your notes to be sure they make sense to you

*Some teachers and students add a fourth R, *Reflect*, as you'll see when you watch the videos in the next Check Your Understanding.

Watch It: How to Use the SQ4R Reading Technique

Watch It: SQ4R (Text Version)
Watch the following two videos to learn more about the SQ4R reading technique:

Watch How to use the SQ4R reading technique (2 minutes) on YouTube (https://youtu.be/ZgAW2_FzF4c)

Watch Effective Reading with SQ4R (6 minutes) on YouTube (https://youtu.be/ziofH7N8ZOE)

KWL Reading Strategy

KWL is a method that can guide you in reading and understanding a text. You can do it working alone, but discussions definitely help. It is composed of only three stages which can be reflected on a worksheet of three columns with the three labels:

1. What we **Know**
2. What we **Want to Know**
3. What we **Learned**

K stands for *Know*

Think first about what you already know about the topic before reading and jot it down in the first column, marked *K*. Discuss with others if possible.

W stands for *Want to know*

In the W column list the things you want to learn about the topic. Record questions, thinking of the five W's and H questions. These questions will help you focus your attention during reading.

L stands for *Learned*

The final stage is to answer your questions, as well as to list what new information you have learned. You can do this either while reading or after you have finished.

Check Your Understanding: KWL Reading Method

Try using the KWL method on a simple task that you would like to know more about. For example, how to make a great cup of coffee, how to make a delicious margarita, information about a medical issue someone you know has been diagnosed with, tips for painting a bedroom—anything you like.

The Reading Apprenticeship (RA) Approach to Comprehension

Reading Apprenticeship is based on the premise that people who have become expert readers can assist learners by modeling what they have learned to do. The idea is that a more proficient reader is present to support the beginner, engaging the beginner in the activity and calling attention to often overlooked or hidden strategies.

This strategy takes a metacognitive approach to comprehension, utilizing various strategies readers may already know how to do, then adding more. For example, most readers have learned to make predictions, ask questions concerning meanings ("I wonder about..."), visualize a scene being described, associate the material being read to some other material and, at the end, summarize the material. By reading together, the more experienced reader walks the beginner through the process by leading them through similar processes.

Now review and affirm important comprehension skills you already possess and complete the exercise below.

Check Your Understanding: Reading Apprenticeship Approach

Go back through the excerpt above on reading comprehension and this time, write marginal notes where you used any of the comprehension tools listed below:

- **Predicting**—guessing what the author would write next.
- **Asking questions** of the material such as, "I wonder about," or "Could this mean?"
- **Visualizing**—trying to picture it in your mind.
- **Connecting** this material to something else you have learned—"It's like..."
- **Noting** where you think you might need to read something over again for comprehension. This is important! It's not a weakness to read things over several times to understand them!
- **Summarizing**—excellent for testing to see if you really understood the main point of the reading.

Summary

In this module you have learned the following:

- How our environment impacts our ability to read.
- Key strategies to increase reading comprehension include practices such as discussion, reciprocal teaching, questioning, and summarizing.
- Text factors such as genres, literary features, organizational patterns, and text features such as headings, maps, charts, and indexes—all aid comprehension.
- A variety of reading strategies including the SQ4R method, annotating, skimming, and scanning.

Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this section is adapted from "5.2 Critical Reading Skills" In *Student Success* by Mary Shier, licensed under CC BY 4.0./An adaptation of:

- The first paragraph and text under "What is Reading Comprehension" has been adapted from "Comprehending College Level Reading by Using the Reading Apprenticeship Approach" in *Blueprint for Success in College and Career* by Phyllis Nissila. Adapted by Mary Shier. CC BY.
- Text under the "The SQ3R Strategy" heading was adapted from "Read with a Purpose: The SQ3R Strategy" in *University 101: Study, Strategize and Succeed* by Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Adapted by Mary Shier. CC BY-SA.
- Alterations include removing Exercise on SQ4R and including two videos. Exercises were renamed as activities.

NOTE-TAKING SKILLS

Introduction

Now that you have spent some time exploring different reading techniques, it is time to talk about note-taking strategies. As you read, you will often want to take notes to reference later. Note-taking is a useful skill that you will want to employ in a variety of settings.

For instance, as a student you will want to develop good note-taking strategies to clarify content and study for tests. In your personal life, you may have to leave a note for someone with follow up instructions, or to jot down something important someone said to relay a message. At work you may have to take notes on prospective clients and recount conversations or training when you are on the job site. Whatever the reason, note-taking is an important skill that you will definitely want to develop as you move throughout your career.

Learning Objectives

- Explain how note-taking supports learning and can be used as an additional learning tool while you read.
- Explore a variety of note-taking techniques, including the list, outline, Cornell and mind mapping methods.

To Do List

- Read "Note-Taking" in *Student Success*.
- Watch the Video, "Taking Notes: Crash Course Study Skills #1."
- Complete the "Note-Taking" Learning Activity.
- Complete the Note-Taking Assignment in Blackboard.

Attribution & References

NOTE-TAKING

You've got the PowerPoint slides for your lecture, and the information in your textbook. Do you need to take notes as well?

Using note-taking in learning. **Source:** *Student Success* by Mary Shier, licensed under CC BY 4.0

Despite the vast amount of information available in electronic formats, taking notes is an important learning strategy. In addition, the way that you take notes matters, and not all note-taking strategies lead to equal results. By considering your note-taking strategies carefully, you will be able to create a set of notes that will help retain the most important concepts from lectures and tests, which will assist you in your exam preparation.

Two Purposes for Taking Notes

People take notes for two main reasons:

1. To keep a record of the information they heard. This is also called the *external storage* function of note-taking.
2. To facilitate learning material they are currently studying.

The availability of information on the internet may reduce the importance of the *external storage* function of note-taking. When the information is available online, it may seem logical to stop taking notes. However, by neglecting to take notes, you lose the benefits of note-taking as a learning tool.

How Note-Taking Supports Learning

Taking notes during class supports your learning in several important ways:

1. Taking notes helps you to focus your attention and avoid distractions.
2. As you take notes in class, you will be engaging your mind in identifying and organizing the main ideas. Rather than passively listening, you will be doing the work of active learning while in class, making the most of your time.

3. Creating good notes means that you will have a record for later review. Reviewing a set of condensed and well-organized notes is more efficient than re-reading longer texts and articles.

Everybody takes notes, or at least everybody claims to. But if you take a close look, many who are claiming to take notes on their laptops are actually surfing the Web, and paper notebooks are filled with doodles interrupted by a couple of random words with an asterisk next to them reminding you that "This is important!" In college and university, these approaches will not work. Your instructors expect *you* to make connections between class lectures and reading assignments; they expect *you* to create an opinion about the material presented; they expect *you* to make connections between the material and life beyond school. Your notes are your road maps for these thoughts. Do you take good notes? Actively listening and note-taking are key strategies to ensure your student success.

Effective note-taking is important because it:

- supports your listening efforts.
- allows you to test your understanding of the material.
- helps you remember the material better when you write key ideas down.
- gives you a sense of what the instructor thinks is important.
- creates your "ultimate study guide."

There are various forms of taking notes, and which one you choose depends on both your personal style and the instructor's approach to the material. Each can be used in a notebook, index cards, or in a digital form on your laptop. No specific type is good for all students and all situations, so we recommend that you develop your own style, but you should also be ready to modify it to fit the needs of a specific class or instructor. To be effective, all of these methods require you to listen actively and to think; merely jotting down words the instructor is saying will be of little use to you.

Note-taking methods

Method	Description	When to Use
Lists	A sequential listing of ideas as they are presented. Lists may be short phrases or complete paragraphs describing ideas in more detail.	This method is what most students use as a fallback if they haven't learned other methods. This method typically requires a lot of writing, and you may find that you are not keeping up with the professor. It is not easy for students to prioritize ideas in this method.
Outlines	The outline method places most important ideas along the left margin, which are numbered with roman numerals. Supporting ideas to these main concepts are indented and are noted with capital letters. Under each of these ideas, further detail can be added, designated with an Arabic number, a lowercase letter, and so forth.	A good method to use when material presented by the instructor is well organized. Easy to use when taking notes on your computer.
Concept Maps	When designing a concept map, place a central idea in the centre of the page and then add lines and new circles in the page for new ideas. Use arrows and lines to connect the various ideas.	Great method to show relationships among ideas. Also good if the instructor tends to hop from one idea to another and back.
Cornell Method	The Cornell method uses a two-column approach. The left column takes up no more than a third of the page and is often referred to as the "cue" or "recall" column. The right column (about two-thirds of the page) is used for taking notes using any of the methods described above or a combination of them. After class or completing the reading, review your notes and write the key ideas and concepts or questions in the left column. You may also include a summary box at the bottom of the page, in which to write a summary of the class or reading in your own words.	The Cornell method can include any of the methods above and provides a useful format for calling out key concepts, prioritizing ideas, and organizing review work. Most universities recommend using some form of the Cornell method.

The List Method

Example: The List Method of Note-taking

Learning Cycle

September 3

Prof. Jones

The learning cycle is an approach to gathering and retaining info that can help students be

successful in Col. The cycle consists of 4 steps which should all be app'd. They are preparing, which sets the foundation for learning, absorbing, which exposes us to new knowledge, capturing, which sets the information into our knowledge base and finally reviewing and applying which lets us set the know. into our memory and use it.

Preparing for learning can involve mental preparation, physical prep, and oper. prep. Mental prep includes setting learning goals for self based on what we know the class w/ cover (see syllabus)/ Also it is very important to do any assignments for the class to be able to learn w/ confidence and....

_____

Physical Prep means having enough rest and eating well. Its hard to study when you are hungry and you won't listen well in class if you doze off.

Operation Prep means bringing all supplies to class, or having them at hand when studying... this includes pens, paper, computer, textbook, etc. Also means setting to school on time and getting a good seat (near the front).

Absorbing new knowledge is a combination of listening and reading. These are two of the most important learning skills you can have.

The list method is usually not the best choice because it is focused exclusively on capturing as much of what the instructor says as possible, not on processing the information. Most students who have not learned effective study skills use this method, because it's easy to think that this is what note-taking is all about. Even if you are skilled in some form of shorthand, you should probably also learn one of the other methods described here, because they are all better at helping you process and remember the material. You may want to take notes in class using the list method, but transcribe your notes to an outline or concept map method after class as a part of your review process. It is always important to review your notes as soon as possible after class and write a summary of the class in your own words.

The Outline Method

Example: The Outline Method of Note-taking

Learning Cycle

September 3

Prof Jones

Learning is a cycle made up of 4 steps:

I. Preparing: setting the foundation for learning.
II. Absorbing: (data input) exposure to new knowledge.
III. Capturing: taking ownership of the knowledge.
IV. Review & Apply: putting new knowledge to work.

I. Preparing

A. Mental Prep.

1. Do assignments—new knowledge is built on prior knowledge.

a. assignments from prior classes.
b. Readings! (May not have been assigned in class – see syllabus!)

2. Review Syllabus

a. Know what instructor expects to cover
b. Know what assignments you need to do
c. Set yr. own obj.

B. Physical Prep

1. Get right amount of rest. Don't zzz in class.
2. Eat right. Hard to focus when you are hungry.
3. Arrive on time.

C. Practical Prep (Organizational Prep):

1. Bring right supplies – (Notebooks, Texts, Pens, etc.)
2. Arrive on time

a. Get organized and ready to listen
b. Don't interrupt the focus of others
c. Get a good seat

3. Sit in the front of the class.

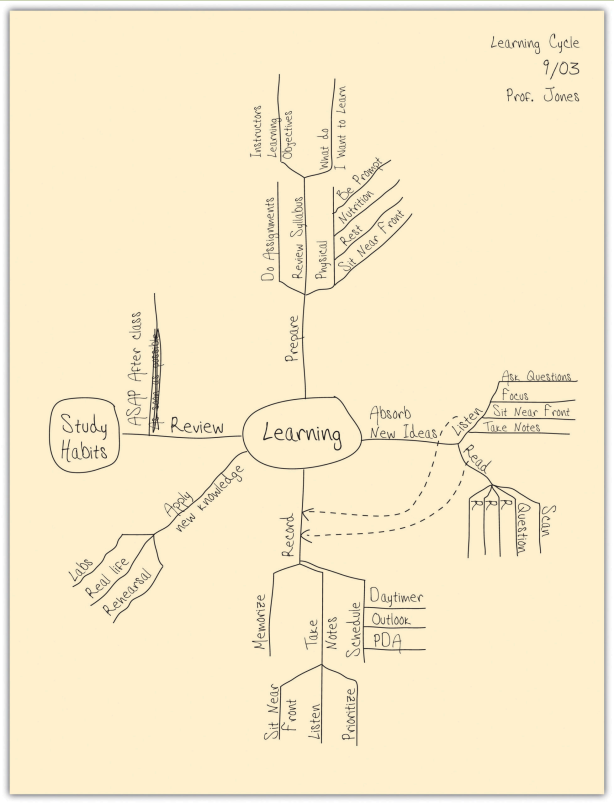
The advantage of the outline method is that it allows you to prioritize the material. Key ideas are written to the left of the page, subordinate ideas are then indented, and details of the subordinate ideas can be indented further. To further organize your ideas, you can use the typical outlining numbering scheme (starting with roman numerals for key ideas, moving to capital letters on the first subordinate level, Arabic numbers for the next level, and lowercase letters following.) At first you may have trouble identifying when the instructor moves from one idea to another. This takes practice and experience with each instructor, so don't give up! In the early stages you should use your syllabus to determine what key ideas the instructor plans to present. Your reading assignments before class can also give you guidance in identifying the key ideas.

If you're using your computer to take notes, a basic word processing application (like Microsoft Word or Works) is very effective. Format your document by selecting the outline format from the format bullets menu. Use the increase or decrease indent buttons to navigate the level of importance you want to give each item. The software will take care of the numbering for you!

After class be sure to review your notes and then summarize the class in one or two short paragraphs using your own words. This summary will significantly affect your recall and will help you prepare for the next class.

The Concept Map Method

Example: The Concept Map Method of Note-taking



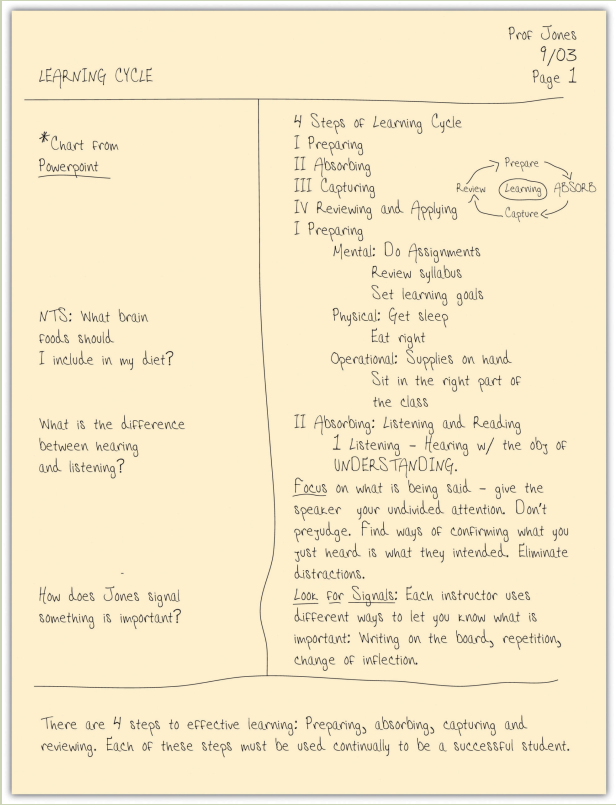
This is a very graphic method of note-taking that is especially good at capturing the relationships among ideas. Concept maps harness your visual sense to understand complex material "at a glance." They also give you the flexibility to move from one idea to another and back easily (so they are helpful if your instructor moves freely through the material).

To develop a concept map, start by using your syllabus to rank the ideas you will listen to by level of detail (from high-level or abstract ideas to detailed facts). Select an overriding idea (high level or abstract) from the instructor's lecture and place it in a circle in the middle of the page. Then create branches off that circle to record the more detailed information, creating additional limbs as you need them. Arrange the branches with others that interrelate closely. When a new high-level idea is presented, create a new circle with its own branches. Link together circles or concepts that are related. Use arrows and symbols to capture the relationship between the ideas. For example, an arrow may be used to illustrate cause or effect, a double-pointed arrow to illustrate dependence, or a dotted arrow to illustrate impact or effect.

As with all note-taking methods, you should summarize the chart in one or two paragraphs of your own words after class.

The Cornell Method

Example: The Cornell Method of Note-taking



The Cornell method was developed in the 1950s by Professor Walter Pauk at Cornell University [1]. It is recommended by many universities because of its usefulness and flexibility. This method is simple to use for capturing notes, is helpful for defining priorities, and is a very helpful study tool.

The Cornell method follows a very specific format that consists of four boxes: a header, two columns, and a footer.

The header is a small box across the top of the page. In it you write identification information like the course name and the date of the class. Underneath the header are two columns: a narrow one on the left (no more than one-third of the page) and a wide one on the right. The wide column, called the "notes" column, takes up most of the page and is used to capture your notes using any of the methods outlined earlier. The left

column, known as the "cue" or "recall" column, is used to jot down main ideas, keywords, questions, clarifications, and other notes. It should be used both during the class and when reviewing your notes after class. Finally, use the box in the footer to write a summary of the class in your own words. This will help you make sense of your notes in the future and is a valuable tool to aid with recall and studying.

Using Index Cards for the Cornell Method

Some students like to use index cards to take notes. They actually lend themselves quite well to the Cornell method. Use the "back" or lined side of the card to write your notes in class. Use one card per key concept. The "front" unlined side of the card replaces the left hand "cue" column. Use it after class to write keywords, comments, or questions. When you study, the cards become flash cards with questions on one side and answers on the other. Write a summary of the class on a separate card and place it on the top of the deck as an introduction to what was covered in the class.

> "I used to tape my lecture classes so I could fill in my sketchy notes afterwards. Now that I'm using the Cornell system, my notes are complete and organized in much less time. And my regular five-minute reviews make learning almost painless. No more taping and listening twice."
>
> — A student at Southern Methodist University

You will have noticed that all methods end with the same step: reviewing your notes as soon as possible after class. Any review of your notes is helpful (reading them, copying them into your computer, or even recasting them using another note-taking method). But THINK! Make your review of notes a thoughtful activity, not a mindless process. When you review your notes, think about questions you still have and determine how you will get the answers. (From the next class? Studying with a friend? Looking up material in your text or on the net?) Examine how the material applies to the course; make connections with notes from other class sessions, with material in your text, and with concepts covered in class discussions. Finally, it's fun to think about how the material in your notes applies to real life. Consider this both at the very strategic level (as in "What does this material mean to me in relation to what I want to do with my life?") as well as at a very mundane level (as in, "Is there anything cool here I can work into a conversation with my friends?").

Instructor Handouts

Some instructors hand out or post their notes or their PowerPoint slides from their lectures. These handouts should *never* be considered a substitute for taking notes in class. They are a very useful complement and will

help you confirm the accuracy of your notes, but they do not involve you in the process of learning as well as your own notes do. After class, review your notes with highlighter in hand and mark keywords and ideas in your notes. This will help you write a summary of the class in your own words.

General Tips on Note-Taking

Regardless of what note-taking method you choose, there are some note-taking habits you should get into for all circumstances and all courses:

1. **Be prepared.** Make sure you have the tools you need to do the job. If you are using a notebook, be sure you have it with you and that you have enough paper. Also be sure to have your pen (and a spare) and perhaps a pen with different-coloured ink to use for emphasis. If you are taking notes on your laptop, make sure the battery is charged! Select the application that lends itself best to your style of note-taking. Microsoft Word works very well for outline notes, but you might find taking notes in Excel to work best if you are working within the Cornell method. (It's easier to align your thoughts in the cue or recall column to your notes in the right column. Just be sure you keep one idea per row!)
2. **Write on only one side of the paper.** This will allow you to integrate your reading notes with your class notes.
3. **Label, number, and date all notes at the top of each page.** This will help you keep organized.
4. **When using a laptop, position it such that you can see the instructor and white board right over your screen.** This will keep the instructor in your field of vision even if you have to glance at your screen or keyboard from time to time. Make sure your focus remains with the instructor and not on your laptop. A word of caution about laptops for note-taking: use them if you are very adept at keyboarding, but remember that not all note-taking methods work well on laptops because they do not easily allow you to draw diagrams and use special notations (scientific and math formulas, for example).
5. **Don't try to capture everything that is said.** Listen for the big ideas and write them down. Make sure you can recognize the instructor's emphasis cues and write down all ideas and keywords the instructor emphasizes. Listen for clues like "the four causes were..." or "to sum up...."
6. **Copy anything the instructor writes on the board.** It's likely to be important.
7. **Leave space between ideas.** This allows you to add additional notes later (e.g., notes on the answer to a question you or one of your classmates asked).
8. **Use signals and abbreviations.** The ones you use are up to you, but be consistent so you will know exactly what you mean by "att." when you review your notes. You may find it useful to keep a key to your abbreviations in all your notebooks.
9. **Use some method for identifying your own thoughts and questions to keep them separate from what the instructor or textbook author is saying.** Some students use different colour ink; others box or underline their own thoughts. Do whatever works for you.

10. **Create a symbol to use when you fall behind** or get lost in your note-taking. Jot down the symbol, leave some space, and focus on what the instructor is covering now. Later you can ask a classmate or the professor to help you fill in what you missed, or you can find it in your textbook.
11. **Review your notes as soon after class as possible (the same day is best).** *This is the secret to making your notes work!* Use the recall column to call out the key ideas and organize facts. Fill in any gaps in your notes and clean up or redraw hastily drawn diagrams.
12. **Write a summary of the main ideas of the class in your own words.** This process is a great aid to recall. Be sure to include any conclusions from the lecture or discussion.
13. **Use notes when preparing for a test or doing an assignment.** Your notes usually have a summary of the most important points and are useful for making sure you incorporate important concepts in your assignments and for focusing on the main concepts when studying for tests and exams.

Watch It: Note Taking

These videos provide some great tips for note-taking as well.

Note Taking (Text Version)
Watch How to take great notes (5:08 minutes) on YouTube (https://youtu.be/UAhRf3U50lM)

Watch Taking notes: Crash Course study skills #1, (8:50 minutes) on YouTube (https://youtu.be/E7CwqNHn_Ns)

What If You Miss Class?

Clearly the best way to learn class material is to be at the class and to take your own notes. In university, regular attendance is expected. But life happens. On occasion, you may have to miss a class or lecture. When this happens, here are some strategies you can use to make up for it:

- Check with the instructor to see if there is another section of the class you can attend. Never ask the instructor "Did I miss anything important?" (Think about what that's saying and you'll see it's rather

insulting.)

- If the instructor posts their lectures as a podcast, listen to the lecture online and take notes. If the instructor uses PowerPoint slides, request a copy (or download them if posted) and review them carefully, jotting down your own notes and questions. Review your notes with a classmate who did attend.
- You may want to borrow class notes from a classmate. If you do, don't just copy them and insert them in your notebook. They will not be very helpful. When you borrow notes from a classmate, you should photocopy them and then review them carefully and mark your copy with your own notes and questions. Use your textbook to try to fill in the gaps. Finally, schedule a study session with the person who gave you the notes to review the material and confirm your understanding.
- If none of these options is available for you, use the course syllabus to determine what was covered in the class, then write a short paper (two pages or so) on the material using the class readings and reliable online sources. See your instructor during office hours to review your key findings and to answer any questions you still may have.

Group Notes: A Collaborative Approach

Groups within a class can take notes together using file-sharing software on the cloud such as Google Docs. The individuals in the group can add to the document in real time as different individuals are adding themselves. This creates a collaborative document that all can use, download, or adapt. This won't work for all situations but can be very useful especially in a fast-moving classroom.

Keeping Your Notes

Class is over, and you have a beautiful set of notes in your spiral notebook or saved in your laptop. You have written the summary of the class in your own words. Now what?

Start by organizing your notes. We recommend you use a three-ring binder for each of your subjects. Print your notes if you used a computer. If you used note cards, insert them in plastic photo holders for binders. Group all notes from a class or unit together in a section; this includes class notes, reading notes, and instructor handouts. You might also want to copy the instructor's syllabus for the unit on the first page of the section.

Next, spend some time linking the information across the various notes. Use the recall column in your notes to link to related information in other notes (e.g. "See class notes date/page").

If you have had a quiz or test on the unit, add it to your binder, too, but be sure to write out the correct answer for any item you missed. Link those corrections to your notes, too.

Use this opportunity to write "notes on your notes." Review your summary to see if it still is valid in light of your notes on the reading and any handouts you may have added to your notes package.

You don't need to become a pack rat with your notes. It is fairly safe to toss them after the end of a course except in the following cases:

1. If the course you took is a prerequisite for another course, or when the course is part of a standard progression of courses that build upon each other (this is very common in math and science courses), you should keep them as a reference and review for the follow-up course.
2. If the course may pertain to your future major, keep your notes. You may not realize it now that they may have future value when you study similar topics or even the same topics in more depth.
3. If you are very interested in the course subject and would like to get into the material through a more advanced course, independent study, or even research, keep your notes as a prep tool for further work.

Summary

Congratulations on finishing the second part of this module! In this module, you learned about the following:

- How note-taking supports learning, and can be used as an additional learning tool while you read
- A variety of note-taking techniques, including the list, outline, Cornell and mind mapping methods

Attribution & References

Notes from Lectures – That You'll Actually Use" in *University 101: Study, Strategize and Succeed* by Kwantlen Polytechnic University. CC BY-SA.

- Alterations include removing exercises.

Notes

1. Pauk, W. & Owens, R.J.Q. (2013). *How to Study in College*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

REFLECTION

Introduction

Now that you have spent some time exploring different reading and note-taking techniques, it is time to reflect and explore how you can tailor these strategies to help you succeed both in and beyond the classroom.

Learning Objectives

- Practice using a variety of reading and note-taking techniques.
- Identify reading and note-taking techniques that work best with the way you learn.

To Do List

- Watch the video on Reflective Writing.
- Read "Two Types of Reflective Writing" in *Intercultural Basic Communications.*
- Watch the video on How to Write a Summary.
- Complete the Reading & Note-Taking Reflection in Blackboard.

Attribution & References

REFLECTIVE WRITING AND SUMMARIES

Reflective Writing Assignments

In this type of writing, your instructor wants to see that you are making personal connections between the course content and experiences in your life. Reflective writing is inextricably linked to critical thinking.

Reflective writing uses first person pronouns and writers are encouraged to support opinions and analysis by referring to personal experiences.

Formal reflective writing assignments differ from discussion board posts by being longer and more detailed. Also, instructors usually want you to use APA formatting (correct font, spacing, indentation, and title page). You may be specifically required to paraphrase and cite information from secondary sources.

What is Reflective Writing?

Watch It: Reflective Writing

Watch Reflective writing (6:30 minutes) on YouTube (https://youtu.be/SntBj0FIApw)

Two Types of Reflective Writing Assignments

1. Reading Reflection
2. Experiential Reflection

Reading Reflection

In this type of reflective writing assignment, you will need to review course materials (read an article or chapter or watch a video or movie) and write a response.

Your response should:

- demonstrate your understanding of the reading by providing a concise summary using your own words
- make a thoughtful and balanced assessment of the materials you've reviewed
- make connections between the course materials and your own experiences and/or to other sources of information on the topic
- identify lack of knowledge or personal bias without fear of losing marks; this is part of the reflection process
- recognize opinions that you may not agree with, and consider these with respect
- consider how what you've learned from the course materials has changed or confirmed your previous thinking about a topic
- identify steps you may take to add to your understanding of this topic
- end with a conclusion that explains how you will use the knowledge you have acquired

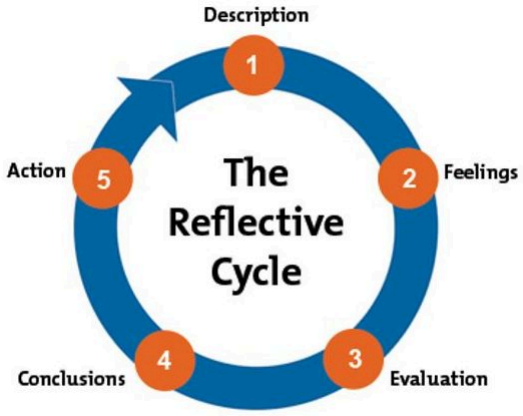


Image credit: *Gibb's reflective cycle* adapted by Mind Tools (n.d.) from *Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods* by G. Gibbs, 1998, Oxford Polytechnic. Used under Fair Dealing.

1. **Description**: These are the details about your writing topic. What happened? When? Where? Why?
2. **Feelings**: Describe the emotions, thoughts and responses you felt and thought towards this topic. Often emotions are evidence of our own discomfort, lack of knowledge or bias towards the topic.
3. **Evaluation**: Compare your previous knowledge of this topic with the new knowledge or experience. Where did you get your information from? Consider the new details and their relation to your previous knowledge.
4. **Conclusions**: Identify new views and ideas; develop questions for future examination.

5. **Action**: Identify changes in your approach or actions towards this topic. For example, more research, more practice, discussion with others, etc.

How to complete a reading reflection:

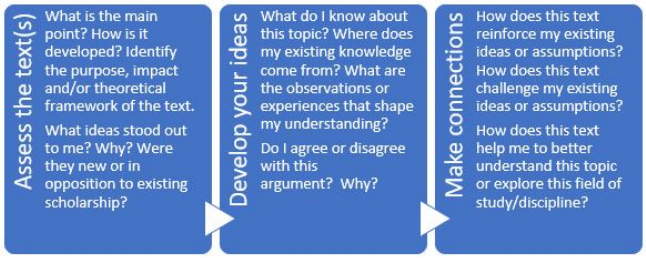
Critical reflection requires thoughtful and persistent inquiry. Although basic questions like "What is the thesis?" and "What is the evidence?" are important to demonstrate your understanding, you need to interrogate your own assumptions and knowledge to deepen your analysis and focus your assessment of the text. In your reflection, you may choose to focus on one part of the reading, rather than the entire article.

- **Summarize the most important information from the assigned reading, video or audio. Concisely explain the topic and the most important details, not all of the small examples.**

Watch It: How to Write a Summary

Watch How to write a summary (3 mins) on YouTube (https://youtu.be/eGW01ldEhtQ)

- **Reflect on the article by assessing the text, developing your ideas, and making connections:**



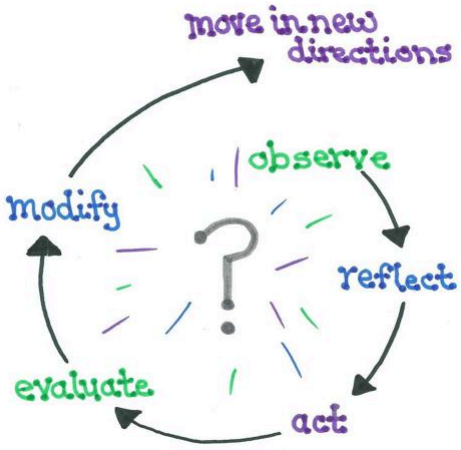
Identify where your ideas originated from; you may include personal experiences, cultural beliefs, APA-cited facts, etc. Use paraphrases to demonstrate your understanding of the material that you read or watched. Include APA documentation style to cite ideas from the source. You are encouraged to write about your own experiences and knowledge about the topic. You may or may not have APA citations for this part.

Experiential Reflection

In this type of reflective writing assignment, you will need to participate in an experience, like a lab or placement, and write a response. This type of writing is often used in programs that require students to participate in hands-on, experiential learning, like business, nursing, and education programs.

Your response should:

- make connections between theory and practice
- describe your experience
- assess a theory or approach based on your observations
- evaluate and critique your experience based on class learning
- evaluate your level of knowledge and skills based on your experience
- determine how you might act differently next time you are in a similar situation



Source: Correlation between Critical Thinking and Reflection, adapted by Confederation College from Reflective blogs in clinical education to promote critical thinking in dental hygiene students by A. O. K. Wetmore, L. D. Boyd, D. M. Bowen, R. E. Pattillo, 2010,Journal of Dental Education, 74(12), p. 1348. Used under Fair Dealing.

Summary

Congratulations on finishing the final part of this module!

- You did some inner exploration and practiced using a variety of note-taking and reading techniques.
- Be sure to try out other techniques as you may want to change them depending on what class you are in, or what assessment you are completing.

You are now ready to move on to Unit 3: Writing Skills.

Attribution & References

References

Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. Further Education Unit. Oxford Polytechnic.

Mind Tools. (n.d.). *Gibb's reflective cycle* [Image]. https://www.mindtools.com/ano9qiu/gibbs-reflective-cycle.

Wetmore, A. O., Boyd, L. D., Bowen, D. M., & Pattillo, R. E. (2010). Reflective blogs in clinical education to promote critical thinking in dental hygiene students. *Journal of Dental Education*, *74*(12), 1337–1350.