

Orientation: Academic Reading for Post Graduate students

Questions about academic reading



Problems

- How do I read long complicated texts?
- How do I decide what to read for my assignments?
- How can I manage large amounts of reading?
- How do I handle new vocabulary?
- What is the best way to keep a record of what I read?
- What are some good note-taking techniques?
- How do I make good choices in the material I read and use?
- What is critical reading?

Tips for academic reading

The '80/20 principle'

- In most reading assignments, 80% of what you need to know is in about 20% of the material.
- So you usually only need to skim read 80% of the document and carefully read the relevant 20%.
- The **purpose** for your reading will dictate how much of the text you have to carefully read.

Tips for academic reading

- Speed reading
- Scanning by key words and phrases
- Skimming by paragraphs

Tips for academic reading

- Context – postgraduate study
- Purpose- assignment, research paper, thesis, seminar paper
- Kind of text – book, website, journal article, conference proceedings
- Strategy – skim, scan, read in depth

A Useful Method: SQ3R

- Survey
- Question
- Read
- Recite
- Review

SURVEY...

Before you read, SURVEY (SCAN) the text, for the

- Title, headings, subheadings
- Captions under pictures, charts, etc.
- Introduction and conclusion
- Read the first sentence of each paragraph
- Summary or abstract

QUESTION...

While you are surveying:

- Turn the title/headings into questions
- If reading a textbook, read the questions at the end of the chapter

READ...

When you begin to READ:

- Note all the underlined, bold or italicized words
- Check your dictionary only when you cannot determine the meaning from the context. DO NOT check every word.
- Give yourself permission to “miss” the meaning of some words. Aim for overall comprehension.

Dealing with difficult words

Some words are more important than others, in which case you will need to look it up:

- Is it in the title?
- Does it occur often?
- Is it a 'jargon' word?

- Try to work out the meaning from the context.
- To understand a action, look up verbs.
- To understand an idea, look up nouns.
- Keep a record of new vocabulary and stylistic tips.

RECITE...

RECITE after you read each section:

- Write a one sentence summary at the end of each section
- Underline/highlight key points
- Makes notes in the margin (or on a separate piece of paper with the full the full reference included in your notes).

REVIEW...

REVIEW your reading

- After you have finished, write a short summary
- Never finish an article without doing some form of oral and written review.
- If studying for an exam, go back through the text and ask yourself questions (flash cards work well).



Your purpose will change as you work through your research tasks.

- When you first receive an assignment or task.
- When you start to answer the assignment question.
- As your ideas start to change
- When you decide you need to read different texts to fill in any gaps in your emerging understanding.

Selecting good resources

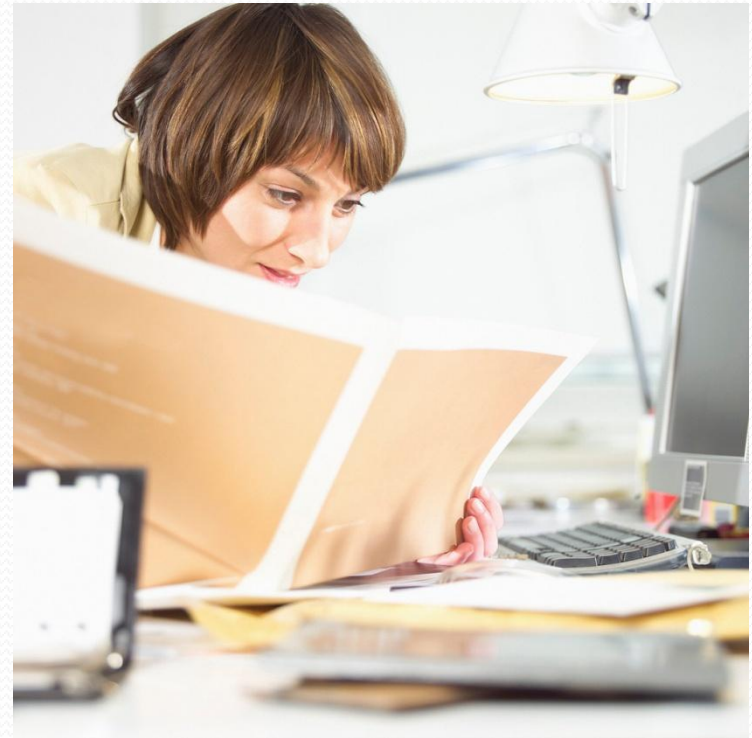
- How do you know a source is credible and can be trusted?
- Book
- Textbook
- Newspaper article
- Journal article
- Report
- Online document
- Graphic/Table/Illustration

Check that your text is worth reading at all. This especially applies to random websites.

Critical Reading...

Critical reading involves making *judgments* about the value of what you are reading .

- You need to carefully assess what you read
- Ask yourself whether the information you are reading is useful for your assignment



To develop critical thinking and reading, you need to ask yourself the following questions :

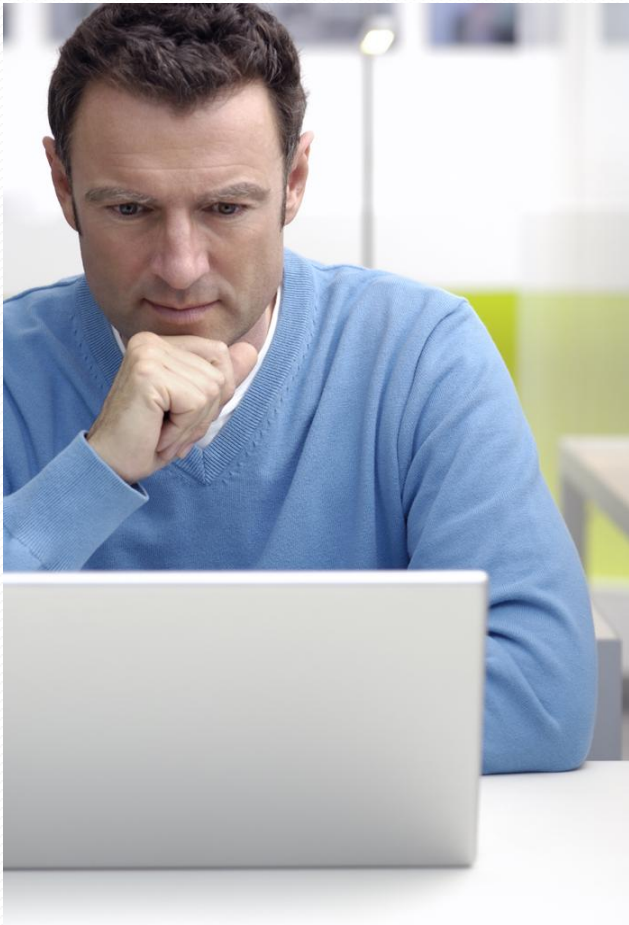
- **What** is this document about?
- Is it **accurate**? How do you know?
- Who wrote it? Is the **writer** an **authority** in this field?



Further Questions...

- Is the writer **trying to persuade** you of a particular position?
- Is this argument based on a **broad or narrow view** of the issue?
- What **evidence** is offered to support the argument?
- What **hasn't been included** in the argument?

Further Questions...



- What would a totally **opposite** point of view look like?
- **Do you agree/disagree** with the position presented by the writer?
- **How did you** come to this view?
- What do **other writers** have to say about this topic?
- Does this text **add anything 'new'** to the topic?
- Is this document **useful for your** present research?

Exercise

Using the techniques discussed in this session read the following article and be prepared to tell the group what it is about in 3 minutes maximum.

Be ready to answer some questions about its credibility.

Usefulness of this technique.

Finally ...

- Think about your reading style and habits – what do you need to change to cope with post graduate study?
- Read for content, purpose and understanding.
- Think strategically! Be selective!
- Read carefully and summarise as you go! Never waste an opportunity to read and learn new things.
- Become a critical reader.



Good Luck!