TiLT Learning Programs Presents
An Academic Skills Workshop

Critical Reading Techniques
What are your “reading” challenges?

First, let’s take a look at what sorts of general reading challenges college students have. Some may not be actual reading problems.

What are your reading challenges? Take a moment to list them.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- etc.
- Discussion.
Before we get into critical reading techniques, let’s talk about common reading challenges and simple solutions.
Common “reading” challenges #1: Time vs. Quantity

Challenge:
Too many reading assignments. Not enough time. Can’t keep up with the amount of class reading.

Possible Solutions:

- A challenge of a large volume of reading is essentially a time management problem—not a speed reading problem.

  Handle this by controlling your time. Add up total pages for all your classes and create a daily reading schedule with targets that will ensure that the readings get done on time. Attack your reading. Stick to it. (150 pages of reading=30 pages each week night).

- If it’s impossible to cover all the reading some week, try this. Prioritize your readings and your time devoting most of your time to the reading with the most complex concepts. Read the key sections of the other readings but possibly not all.

- Others?
#2: I can’t stay focused.
Challenge: Can’t sustain my attention or keep focused on my reading. (I get distracted, fall asleep, etc.)

Possible Solutions:

- Did you eat enough? Sleep enough? Are you physically comfortable?

- Choose the best time of day for your reading. When are you most alert?

- Choose the best location for your reading. Where are you likely to not be distracted?
#3: I just don’t get it.
Challenge: Don’t understand the reading and/or not getting the key concepts while reading.

Possible Solutions:

- Don’t pass over key terms you don’t understand. These mount up and soon you are lost. Take the time to clear them up in the glossary, dictionary or study guide. This goes for English vocabulary words too. Clearing these up as you go will speed your progress and comprehension in the long run.

- If your instructor has provided a reading or study guide—use it!

- Find a supplementary book that presents the material in a simpler, “reader-friendly” way.

- Study with a study buddy from your class, get a tutor, or see your instructor during office hours.

- Apply the active reading strategies that follow.
#4: I can’t remember it.
#4: I can’t remember it.

I can’t recall what I just read. I can’t apply what I read.

Possible Solutions:
- Take notes while you are reading.
- Draw diagrams or concept maps.
- Find pictures or 3D models of what you are studying about.
- Come up with examples of how the information relates to your life.
- Backtrack and reread.
Research shows that good readers are readers who are active, rather than passive. They take control.

Good readers are strategic readers. They attack their reading with a set of strategies.

Good readers monitor themselves while reading (metacognition) and have fix-up strategies when understanding breaks down.
Discussion:

Let’s take a look at the various types of texts that students could be required to read. We don’t read these for the same purposes or in the same way. Do we have any samples here?

What is the purpose for reading each? How can the reader best achieve that purpose?

- Textbook (chemistry, history, geology, etc.) each has a different text structure (procedure, sequence, description, etc.) Knowing this is useful for note-taking.
- Creative works: Shakespeare, essays, short stories
- Scientific journal articles
- Mathematics. Other disciplines?
Some questions to ask yourself:

What type of reading is this? Non-fiction text, short story, historical account, poem, Shakespearean play, scientific journal article?

What is the purpose for reading this?

What do I already know?

What is the author’s purpose?

What is the structure of the text? (Description, argument, process, comparison, etc.) Does this give a clue to how I could comprehend and take notes during reading?

For example, a historical account might be best understood by taking notes on timeline while reading. A process might best be understood by creating a flowchart. A description could best be understood by creating a concept map.

[See handouts re: Questions related to readings.]
Here’s a strategy common to many textbook readings. Preview—Question—Read to Answer the Questions—Review

Previewing:

1. Turn to the chapter and read the Title.

2. Read the headings and subheadings. Look at the diagrams, photos, charts, and graphs. Read the captions.

3. Ask yourself what do I already know? What do I need to know?

4. Turn to the end of the chapter and read the review or discussion questions.

5. Now turn to back to the beginning of the chapter to begin reading. Read to find the answers to these questions.
During Reading

- Read the material carefully.
- Pay attention to boldface key terms and definitions.
- Look for answers to the study questions as you read.
- Employ active reading strategies such as making annotations in the margins, highlighting, underlining, and summarizing key points.
- Monitor your comprehension. When material becomes confusing, backtrack, reread and clarify confusing concepts before going on.
After Reading

- Try reciting in your own words the answers to your study questions.
- If you can’t recall information, review the material.
- Review your notes regularly.
- See the SQ3R Strategy Handout.
“Skilled readers do not read blindly, but purposely. They have an agenda, goal, or objective. Their purpose, together with the nature of what they are reading, determines how they read. They read in different ways in different situations for different purposes. Of course, reading has a nearly universal purpose: to figure out what an author has to say on a given subject.”

Discussion

How can we help?