**Academic Reading**

**Reading for Speed and Content**

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| **AIMS**:   * To introduce students to reading for research purposes. * To explain the benefits of more systematic reading styles. * To outline the techniques used for scanning, skimming and speed reading. |

Students are often faced with an array of lengthy journal articles and books when undertaking research and need to be able to find the content needed quickly and effectively. This lecture aims to:

* Provide techniques and guidance on scanning and skimming source material.
* Provide students with the means to develop their speed reading skills.

**SECTION ONE: What, why and how of reading [3 minutes]**:

Academic reading is different to reading for pleasure, therefore academic literature needs to be approached differently.

Students should always aim to maximise their comprehension of the ideas presented in a text.

**Reading is a journey to be absorbed, not a destination to be reached.**

Remind students that as well as the course readers they will be expected to undertake independent research in order to complete their course assignment. Researching for the assignment will provide them with many academic resources. Some will be relevant, others won’t and they will need to use the techniques in this lecture to quickly cut the wheat from the chaff. They need to be able to quickly answer the following questions:

How do you tell if a document is relevant?

Do you need to read everything on a subject?

How do you quickly find the information you require?

They need to quickly determine how thoroughly they need to understand a text.

The breadth of relevant sources is long and the types of sources are varied. However the techniques suggested are relatively universal. Variations will be highlighted.

**SECTION TWO: Academic Reading [XX minutes]**

**Reading Styles:**

* Researching a topic can return many results.
  + How do you quickly determine which are relevant and which are not?
* Some authors seem to be paid by the word.
  + How do you short cut overly long articles?
* Some texts are only partially relevant.
  + How do you quickly identify relevant passages?
* It is easy to get distracted and stray from the topic.
  + How do maintain focus on your topic?

**Scanning** – glancing over the text to pick out key words and phrases. *Fast*.

**Skimming** – reading selected parts of a text in a systematic way. *Fast*.

**Studying** – carefully reading the full text. *Slow*.

**Benefits of scanning**:

Enables you to quickly find references to key ideas throughout a text.

* Names, statistics, theories, etc

Aids selection of reference material for research assignments.

**Scanning Techniques:**

* Look through a document, without reading every word, seeking specific words or phrases.
* Keeping a visual image of the word or phrase in mind will make it more visible on the page.
* Remember numbers can be presented in numerals as well as words.
* Skim long documents first to narrow down areas in which key words or information are likely to appear.
* Try reading only highlighted words and phrases (bold, italics, underlined, etc).
* Scan vertically as much as horizontally, to avoid reading the text.
* When you find a key word read the sentence or paragraph, as necessary.

***Class activity***: Scan this text to find the key themes. What are they?

**Skimming**

**Benefits of skimming:**

* Enables you to review a document and get the gist of a text, without reading the whole piece.
* Helps selection of reference material.
* Can be useful for revision. Skim texts to check your understanding and recollection of the themes. Then study any sections that are unclear or weak.
* If you have determined that a particular author has written on your subject, skim readings other texts by the author can add to your research material or determine whether they hold a particular point of view of theoretical bias.
* Skimming a contents page or chapter/section headings can reveal biases or tone of the piece. The choice of wording for titles is very deliberate.
* If the text is presenting an argument, skim for the main claim and any evidence provided to support the argument.
* Skim the introduction or abstract for:
  + The thesis statement.
  + Limitations
  + Methodology
* These will all help you to determine if the article is relevant.

**Skimming Techniques:**

* Read the title. This may provide you with sufficient detail to discount the work immediately. It may also indicate any bias of the author.
  + Peter B. Evans, “National Autonomy and Economic Development: Critical Perspectives on Multinational Corporations in Poor Countries” in *International Organisation*
* First sentence of each paragraph.
  + Usually a coherent synopsis of the paragraph.
  + Paragraphs generally focus on only one point.
  + Some authors may begin with a question or anecdote. In these cases the final sentence of the paragraph may contain the synopsis.

***Class activity***: Take a text from the reader and highlight the first line of each paragraph. Does this provide an overview of the themes of the extract? Reading the rest provides more detail and clarification.

* Read the first and last paragraphs.
  + Introduction and Conclusion.
* Read section headings and sub-headings only.
  + Indicates the content and perspective of the text.

**Studying**

Benefits:

* Enables optimum comprehension.
* This is what you are here for, so no other benefits are required.
* The techniques given here are to help you study a little faster, but should not be undertaken to the detriment of understanding.

Techniques:

These first ones should help you understand and therefore read faster.

* Scan and skim the document first.
  + Provides a gist of the argument.
  + Provides questions, for which you will seek the answers.
  + May enable you to skip parts that you don’t need.

These can increase reading speed, however we all capture and retain information differently. For some students these techniques may reduce comprehension. They should be used with caution.

To speed up reading:

* Avoid re-reading sentences. The following sentence may provide the clarity you are seeking.
* Avoid sub-vocalising (reading aloud, moving your lips or pronouncing every word in your head).
* Take breaks to allow your mind to absorb what you have read in manageable amounts.

**Tips for Success**

Academic Journal Articles:

* Read the abstract.
  + - * Usually a paragraph or two, this lists the main facts and arguments in the text. By reading this you will quickly get to grips with the content of the article and its relevance to your research.
* If no abstract available, read the introduction and concluding paragraphs

***Class activity***: Take an abstract from a journal article. From this pull out the thesis statement, any limitations the author will use, the methodology and the conclusions drawn. Does this present a good summary of the piece?

Books:

* Read the dust jacket for relevant content.
* Check the contents page for relevant chapters.
  + Chapter titles can also reveal much about the author as the choice of words can indicate any bias or tone.
* Check relevant chapters for section headings and sub-headings.
* Read the first (introduction) and last (conclusion) paragraph of relevant chapters/sections to get an overview of their content.
* If only one or two chapters are relevant, study these, but maybe skim the remaining chapters in case they contain relevant information.
* Academic journals provide scholarly book reviews, which will provide you with a good synopsis and may be sufficient to enable you to discount or include books in your research pile

Reports:

* Check for an executive summary or foreword.
* Review the table of contents for separate chapters on analysis and data.

Although student may feel that they concentrate better accompanied by music or the babble on Jammie Steps, the mind can process information faster with fewer distractions. If no quiet space is available, invest in some earplugs, switch off the mobile phone and see how much quicker they can get through the course reader.

**Skim** all documents to get the gist.

**Study** texts in the course reader and those of full relevance to the research theme for the greatest **comprehension**.

**Scan** documents for small items of information.

**Skim** reading for revision purposes should highlight areas for further study.

Rather than skim reading an entire book, check academic journals for scholarly book reviews.

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