

Making a Reading Plan

Note: In this handout, the word “text” is used to mean any kind of writing—an article, a chapter, a book, a poem, an email, an advertisement—anything that can be read.

Before Reading	
What do you know about this topic already?	Reading theorists call this “activating prior knowledge.” Thinking about what you already know helps create a structure for learning more. It makes it easier to add to your knowledge and understanding.
What are your expectations or predictions about what the text will say?	Having expectations is the beginning of engagement with the text. You want to see if your expectations are right, so you are more interested in reading. Interest makes it easier to keep reading.
Why are you reading this text? What are your goals?	These are key questions because the answers change the way you read the text. Unfortunately, professors often assume that the reason they have assigned a text is obvious, or that it is educationally useful for the student to figure it out on their own. If a teacher doesn’t tell you why you are reading, it is a good idea to ask. However, don’t ask, “Why are we reading this?” which might sound like a challenge. Instead, ask something like, “While we are reading this, what do you want us to look for?”
What strategies will help you achieve your goals?	We read differently for different purposes. Depending on the type of text and your reasons for reading it, you may want to scan for specific information, skim for a general sense of the content, or read thoroughly to follow a chain of claims, arguments, and evidence. If it is a political text, you may be reading to analyze rhetorical strategies. If it is a literary text, you may be looking for themes, literary devices, or character development. If you are looking for support for a research question, you might skim the text quickly to see if it is suitable. If it looks like it is, you might go back and give it a thorough reading.
While Reading	
How will you annotate the reading? What are you looking for?	Marking up a text makes it easier to go back and find the important and interesting parts of it. It saves time later. It also helps you understand the text. However, it is hard to mark up a text unless you know why you are reading it and how you are going to use it. Some people underline important ideas, key words, and difficult passages. Some have a dialogue with the text and write questions and comments in the margins. It may help to label different sections and note what they are about. If you can’t mark in the text, sticky notes can be used, or you can keep a reading notebook.

<p>If the reading turns out to be difficult, how will you deal with this difficulty?</p>	<p>In college, we often have to read texts that are confusing or difficult. When you hit a tough part, sometimes it is best to just keep going. It may be that reading farther will explain the part that is confusing. If that doesn't work, it may be helpful to analyze why the section is difficult. Is it because you don't know some words and you can't build up enough understanding from the context to guess? You may want to look up a word or two. However, if you look up every word you don't know, you may lose the flow of the reading. Is it because the writer is assuming you know about people, things, or events that you don't actually know? You may want to look something up. However, it is often the case that re-reading a passage and then reading further will begin to solve the problem.</p>
<p>After Reading</p>	
<p>What is your quick take on what the author tries to do and how well the author does it?</p>	<p>Mentally composing a quick summary of what the text is about, what the writer tries to accomplish, and whether it was successful or not will solidify the ideas in your mind and prepare you to discuss it later, or return to it when it is time to use some of the ideas.</p>
<p>Are there difficult parts you need to re-read or find out more about in order to achieve your goals?</p>	<p>Coming back to a text to approach the difficult parts with a fresh state of mind will often resolve the difficulties. We rarely understand everything in a difficult text the first time. However, you may have decided that your understanding is enough for your current purposes.</p>
<p>Did the text meet your expectations or surprise you?</p>	<p>Thinking about the gap between our expectations and what the text actually said helps make us better readers in the future. It also makes us feel like we own the text in some way, that we have a relation to it.</p>