



## A Strategic Approach to Effective and Efficient Reading

In order to read in course-specific ways expected by your professors you will need to engage in a strategic, purposeful and active reading process. Rarely, however, are students taught these active, course-specific reading strategies. The aims of this handout is to fill that gap and help you develop a strategic approach to reading in each of your courses. The most effective and efficient reading is specific to the course context, specific to the particular text and its functions and features, and in anticipation/preparation for a future assignment.

Your reading approach should include time, attention and effort devoted to the text at hand DURING reading, but also to the context and use of the text BEFORE and AFTER your reading of it. Before reading you will need to make decisions about how to learn from the text based upon how the assigned text relates to lectures, precept and assignments. For instance, is the text background to lecture, an elaboration of lecture, does it cover different complementary content to lecture, does it fit into the set of assigned readings in a particular way, should you read in anticipation of precept or problem-sets in a particular way? Also, understanding how the content of the text functions and fits into the course curriculum will be important in determining the depth and comprehensiveness of your reading. For instance, is the whole of the text salient to the course or this week's topic, or was it assigned because one particular aspect, topic or theme relate to the course?

Use the following guide and seek to adapt and improve upon its suggestions. Notice how the guidance given describes not only methods (observable actions) but mental processes (e.g. decision-making, building connections, recalling) and links multiple methods and processes together into a coherent approach to reading and learning from text. It does NOT simply list tips of WHAT to do without guidance on HOW to do it well.

**Before: Situate, Strategize & Set Purpose**

**During: Read to Understand, Create a Record/Resource**

**After: Make Memorable & Useful**

1. Seek to understand where the assigned text “comes from,” why the text/portion was assigned, and what your professor expects you to bring to and get from it for the purposes of the course.
  - a. Situate the text in the course and in the larger historical and discursive contexts to understand its purpose and argument
2. **Establish a clear reading purpose:** Determine as much as possible in advance what you want to get from the text and how you might use what you learn (e.g. for class discussion, solve a problem, evidence for an essay)
  - a. Find out how the text connects to the course goals and objectives
  - b. Find out how the text functions and fits in the current unit/topic (including in relation to lectures/class and other assigned texts)
  - c. Consider on what tasks or assignments you will use what you learn
3. **Read to fulfill your purpose:** Read with questions in mind and seek to answer them and note what you are getting so you can (1) return to it and (2) use it in the future.
  - a. Survey, Chunk, Actively Recall & Connect
  - b. Look for patterns in the design of the text and use them to organize your thinking and note making (e.g. Claim/Point>Evidence>Explanation)
  - c. As you are reading, create some kind of useful record/resource of what you are learning, thinking, wondering about, etc. that you can use on the assignments or tasks. Keep in mind the assignment or task for which you are reading: in preparation for lecture, to participate in discussion, to write a response, to take a test, to write an essay, etc. and mark up the text and create a tool to help you do these tasks.
  - d. Track/Assess your understanding and anticipate how you will use what you are learning.
4. **Post-Reading & Selective Re-Reading:** Solidify your knowledge and put it in a form for future use.
  - a. Quickly review your notes and what you have learned—adding as useful.
  - b. Ask yourself how this text/reading builds on the course thus far; what does it add? How does it fit into the argument, explanation, or ‘story’ the course is making?
  - c. Make a resource for class discussion, paper, exam or other (e.g. p-sets, Office Hours)
    - i. For discussions: Sketch out main points, articulate questions to ask, etc.
    - ii. For exams: Articulate a possible question and write out a short (1-2 paragraphs) answer which you can use to study later.
    - iii. For writing: Note how you might use an idea, quote, etc. in a paper.
  - d. Share what you took away from your reading of the text with a classmate, tutor, instructor or even a family member to get feedback and make it stick.