

Strategies to Improve Reading

In this handout you will discover 10 strategies to improve your reading skills as outlined in “On Course: Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life” by Skip Downing. Reading is one of the most important skills you can have for success in college. The ability to read and understand complex texts is essential for college success.

Keep in mind that reading is not a passive activity. When you read, you must be actively engaged. There is a difference between reading words on a page and reading to learn. Let’s look at ways we can maximize time spent reading.

1) Be positive.

If you can read, you can learn virtually any information or skill you need in order to improve your life! Think about this – How do doctors become doctors and make a lot of money? They go to school and read! If you want something in life, you have to learn. Reading is a critical part of learning.

2) Create a distributed reading plan.

Read a little bit every day. Don’t cram all of your reading into one session. By distributing your reading assignments into smaller chunks, you will be able to remember what you read with greater ease.

3) Read when you are most alert.

Are you a morning person? Read in the morning! Are you a night owl? Read at night. It doesn’t matter when you read as long as you are alert enough to comprehend and retain what you are reading.

4) Read where you can concentrate.

Some people can read with music playing in the background, but many cannot. When reading, make sure you are in an environment where all of your focus can be the material you are seeking to understand.

5) Review past readings.

When you sit down to read, quickly review information you read in the past. This review will help information stick in your brain longer. It will also help you learn new information easier because you can connect new information to old information. When you can connect new information to old information, you remember the new information easier.

6) Preview before reading.

Reading a chapter without reviewing is like running a race without warming up. Just as an athlete needs to stretch and do a few warm up exercises before training, your brain needs to warm up before reading. To preview your text, read the chapter title and section headings. Read bold, underlined or italicized words.

7) Identify the purpose of what you are reading.

Much like the last point, you want to have an idea of what you are about to read. If you understand the purpose of what you are reading, you’ll have a better grasp on what you should gain from reading the text.

8) Concentrate on reading faster.

While the goal of reading is to retain information, not race the clock, it is helpful to increase your reading speed. In college you will have to read a lot of books. If you can increase your reading speed, you will be able to maximize your study time and have more time to enjoy other activities.

To increase your reading time, time yourself as you read one page. Then time yourself as you read another page. Try to beat your record each time you track your speed. It is realistic that you could improve your reading speed by 50 percent, but remember that any improvement is fantastic.

9) Pause to recite.

It is important to take mini-breaks while reading to recite what you learned. Stop at the end of a section and tell yourself what you learned. It may be difficult at first to recite what you read, but it will get easier with practice.

10) Mark your text.

If you have purchased (NOT rented) your textbook, make notes in the margins. Underline important statements, highlight key ideas, circle terms and underline their definitions. Place a symbol like a star to draw your attention to an important idea. Place a question mark by puzzling information and ask about it when you go back to class. Be sure to mark only 10-15 percent of your text so you will select only what is truly important.

As you put these strategies into practice, you should find that you retain more information while reading. For more reading strategies and study tips, check out “On Course: Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life” by Skip Downing in the Academic Support Center.

Source Used

Downing, Skip. On Course: Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life. 2017. Boston. Cengage Learning