

Reading, Note-making and Summarising [Fact sheet]

By the end of this factsheet, you will have a better understanding of how to:

- Read effectively
- Take notes using your own words
- Summarise texts

Reading at university

At university, you are expected to read the arguments of other academics to develop your own understanding of your subject area. Typically, you will read a wide range of texts from a wide range of sources – *course books, reports, academic journals, reports etc.* By developing your reading strategies, you will find it easier to:

- Locate relevant/ specific information
- Understand the purpose of the texts you read

The kind of detailed reading you will find yourself doing at university can be broken up into six stages:

Stage 1 – Survey the text

- Before you start, think about why you are reading.
Why am I reading this? What is my purpose? Why is it on my reading list?
- Identify the publisher and date of publication.
Is this a reliable source of information? Is it up-to-date?
- Read the title.
What does the title tell me?
- Read the abstract. (The abstract is an overview of the text)
What is the purpose of the text? What are the main findings? What are the main conclusions?

Stage 2 – Quickly look through the text

- Quickly read any headings and subheadings. Look at any diagrams, tables and graphs
How is the information structured in the main body of the text? Which parts of the text are most important to you?

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Stage 3 – Quickly read the sections that are important for your reading task

- Skim through the relevant sections of the text quickly for general understanding.

What are the writer's main points? What is the main argument the writer is making? How is this useful to me?

- Write down any questions you think the text will answer

Stage 4 - Reading the text more closely

- Read the text carefully to see if it answers your questions.
- Underline / highlight key words as you read.
- Make notes

Stage 5 - Reading for detail (analysing arguments)

Look over your notes and refer back to the section you have just read. Are there still things that you don't understand, or questions that are unanswered? Choose any parts of the section that you think are difficult but important, and re-read those parts to see if you can find the answer.

As you review your reading and the notes you have taken, focus on the purpose of the text and try to evaluate the arguments the writer is using.

Consider the following questions:

- How does this relate to me?
- What is the writer's background / perspective? Does this influence anything?
- Are there sufficient examples given? Are the examples given convincing?
- Is there sufficient evidence given? Is the evidence given convincing? Why / not?
- How much of the text is fact and how much is opinion?
- Are there any problematic generalisations?
- Are the conclusions supported by the rest of the text? Why / not?

Stage 6 - Summarise the text

The final stage is to summarise what you have read. Summary writing is an important part of academic study as it demonstrates that you understand the text and that you can communicate that understanding effectively. An effective summary should:

- Clearly identify the main topic of the text
- Clearly identify the author's position on the main topic
- Use good grammar to communicate clearly to the reader using your own words as much as possible
- Reference source material accurately