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## Active Reading Strategies

Choose the strategies that work best for you or that best suit your purpose.

- **Ask yourself pre-reading questions.** For example: What is the topic, and what do you already know about it? Why has the instructor assigned this reading at this point in the semester?
- **Identify and define any unfamiliar terms.**
- **Bracket the main idea or thesis of the reading, and put an asterisk next to it.** Pay particular attention to the introduction or opening paragraphs to locate this information.
- **Put down your highlighter. Make marginal notes or comments instead.** Every time you feel the urge to highlight something, write instead. You can summarize the text, ask questions, give assent, protest vehemently. You can also write down key words to help you recall where important points are discussed. Above all, strive to enter into a dialogue with the author.
- **Write questions in the margins, and then answer the questions in a reading journal or on a separate piece of paper.** If you're reading a textbook, try changing all the titles, subtitles, sections and paragraph headings into questions. For example, the section heading "The Gas Laws of Boyle, Charles, and Avogadro" might become "What are the gas laws of Boyle, Charles, and Avogadro?"
- **Make outlines, flow charts, or diagrams that help you to map and to understand ideas visually.** See the reverse side for examples.
- **Read each paragraph carefully and then determine "what it says" and "what it does."** Answer "what it says" in only one sentence. Represent the main idea of the paragraph in your own words. To answer "what it does," describe the paragraph's purpose within the text, such as "provides evidence for the author's first main reason" or "introduces an opposing view."
- **Write a summary of an essay or chapter in your own words.** Do this in less than a page. Capture the essential ideas and perhaps one or two key examples. This approach offers a great way to be sure that you know what the reading really says or is about.
- **Write your own exam question based on the reading.**
- **Teach what you have learned to someone else!** Research clearly shows that teaching is one of the most effective ways to learn. If you try to explain aloud what you have been studying, (1) you'll transfer the information from short-term to long-term memory, and (2) you'll quickly discover what you understand — and what you don't.

(over)

# 21 Tips for Effective Textbook Reading -

Niagara University

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1. Choose a place to read where there will be a minimum of distractions.
2. Try to sit in the same place each time you read your textbook.
3. Read at peak periods of attention, rather than when you are tired or distracted.
4. Do not read your most difficult textbook at the end of a study session. Push yourself to read it first or second.
5. Make a schedule for all your reading; take a few moments to plan your study and reading time for all your classes.
6. Reward yourself after reading.
7. Get interested in the textbook by
  1. trying to predict the author's thoughts
  2. trying to connect the chapter with previous chapters
  3. trying to connect what you are reading with what you've in other courses or learned in other courses, or with your own observations or experiences.- reading critically
  4. asking questions while you read. For example . . .

if you're reading a psychology chapter entitled "States of Consciousness". . .

"You have probably heard stories of people under hypnosis being able to recall details of a crime they witnessed, such as remembering a license plate number. Because hypnosis has been reported to improve memory, it has been used in police investigations."

. . . you might ask these questions:

*How does someone get hypnotized?*

*Is hypnosis reliable?*

*If hypnosis is used in police investigations, can something recalled under hypnosis be used in court?*

*Have such recollections ever swayed the outcomes of a court case?*

8. Combine mental and physical activities. For example, write notes and underline key points in your textbook while reading. Also, consider mapping the reading.
9. Vary your activities. Alternate textbook reading, for example, with accounting problems or a chemistry lab report.
10. Keep a distractions list nearby. Jot down items that distract you while you're reading that you need to remember later on (such as something you need to buy, or a reminder to make an appointment).
11. Keep a tally (////) of how often your mind wanders while you're reading.
12. Prop up your textbook, so your angle of vision is approximately 90°.
13. Avoid moving your lips as you read.
14. Avoid moving your finger along the lines as you read.
15. Avoid moving your head from left to right as you read.
16. Avoid distracting physical activities such as tapping your foot or chewing gum while reading.
17. As you read, think of the writer(s) who wrote the textbook. Remember that there is a real person behind the print. Consider why and how that person wrote what you're reading. Consider how that author chose to organize the material.
18. Treat reading as only the first step in the reading process. One reading is seldom enough. For mastery, you'll also need to re-read, review, write summaries, and/or discuss the material with others.
19. Think of reading as communication and thinking.
20. Establish a purpose for reading each chapter and each section, by turning the headings into questions.

Try to begin your questions with "WHAT," "HOW," and "WHY," words that lead to more detailed responses. Searching for the answers while you read will result in more active reading.

For the biology heading "Regulation of Bile Release," ask "How is bile release regulated?" Then read to find the answer. For the history heading "Dawn of the Atomic Age," begin with the question "When did the Atomic Age begin?" but continue with questions such as "How did the Atomic Age develop?" and "How did the Atomic Age alter life in the 20th century?" The active thinking needed to write such questions will expand your understanding of the material.