L!BRARY

Reading Efficiently

The reading that you do for your studies is often different from the reading that you do for leisure. If you learn the correct technique for your reading goal then you can save yourself time and ensure that you read efficiently and effectively for your essays, reports or projects.

Reading Goals

Setting yourself a reading goal ensures that you read an item with a purpose, enabling you to prioritise the information that you read. To help you to define a reading goal, ask yourself:

"What questions do I need answering?"

This will help you to identify the information that is centrally relevant, partially relevant or simply not relevant at all.

Reading Styles or Techniques

Once you have established your reading goals, you can choose the style of reading most suited to your task. The following types of reading are all commonly used and you will probably recognise them. The SQ3R technique might be unfamiliar to you but is a very useful technique for reading in the academic context.

a) Skimming

Skimming involves going through a text rapidly, probably at two or three times your normal reading speed and being selective in what you read. It is a useful technique for deciding whether or not you are going to use a text, just as you would flip through a book or magazine in a shop. It will also help you get some idea of the way in which the text is organised, its tone and style, to get the gist of the writer's meaning, or to review something that you have already read to refresh your memory. It is useful to skim a text before reading any item in depth, or when you only need superficial knowledge.

To Skim effectively, remember to look at the index, chapter headings, introductory and concluding paragraphs. You can also skim through the main content by reading the first line of each paragraph. This should give you the flavour of the book.

b) Scanning

Scanning is a style of reading that is more targeted than skimming. It is used when you know exactly what you are looking for, for example when you are looking for a definition in a dictionary, or when looking through a text for key words or phrases. It is visual matching task; you find the word or phrase for which you are looking and then follow the text.

When using the scanning style, you must remember to be flexible because an author might not use exactly the same keywords as you. Be prepared to think around your topic.

c) Receptive Reading

This style is used when you need a good, general understanding, of a text or to discover accurately what has been written. It may also be used to prompt you to think creatively and reflectively. When adopting this style you will probably have already skimmed through the text to see what it contains.

When reading receptively you need to pay close attention to the text, perhaps allowing for periods in which to reflect upon what you have read. You work through the text in sequence, at a moderate speed. This style also allows plenty of time for you to make appropriate notes.

Note Taking

When reading efficiently you will almost certainly need to take notes about the items that you have read. To find out more about effective note taking see the advice sheet on Taking Notes.

It is also very important to make a note of the full details of any text that you have read so that you can cite it correctly in your work and include it in your bibliography.

d) SQ3R

SQ3R is a technique that can be used effectively when reading for academic study. It can involve all of the above reading styles. It stands for **S**urvey, **Q**uestion, **R**ead, **R**ecall, **R**eview.

- **Survey**
  Quickly look for basic information using the contents list, index, main heading etc.
- **Question**
  Note down the questions that you want answered to keep your reading active and purposeful.
- **Read**
  Vary your reading style and speed to identify and read the section which will help you to answer your questions. Make brief notes if this will help.
- **Recall**
  Try to answer your questions without looking at the notes you have made or the reading material.
- **Review**
  Look back over the text to check if your information is accurate.

Reading Environment

As well as setting your reading goals and learning useful styles and techniques to read efficiently and effectively you need to make sure that your physical environment is conducive to your work. Elements to consider include:

a) Lighting

Ensure that you have sufficient light to read comfortably, but avoid glare. The light should ideally be coming from above, or over one shoulder, and it should not be reflected back at you. You should also try to avoid too harsh a contrast between your reading pool of light and the light in the surrounding area.

b) Eyesight

If you suffer from eyestrain or headaches take a break from reading and think about getting your eyes checked by an optician. Blurred vision and headaches could be signs that you are straining your eyes.

c) Posture

It is important to adopt a comfortable reading position and posture to reduce fatigue and mental strain. This will enable you to work more effectively and, if necessary, for longer.

As this advice sheet shows, efficient reading is more than simply reading everything at greater speed.
You will save more time if you ask yourself why you are reading and adopt a strategy to suit that need.