



## Reading Difficult Material

When you're faced with reading material that seems above your level of understanding—whether it's a couple of pages, a journal article or an entire book—it's easy to feel overwhelmed. However, don't give up; the ability to absorb challenging or 'dry' material is an essential skill for uni study.

### Try the following tips:

- If you're feeling snowed under by the amount of reading you need to complete, **break it up into chunks**. Choose a moderate amount of material and set yourself the goal of completing it and of working to understand it.
- **Skim** the reading and **get an overview**. Read titles, headings, sub-headings, and any summaries or abstracts. Note any graphs, charts, and diagrams. Quickly read topic sentences (the first sentence of each paragraph) to get a general idea of what the reading is about.
- Read first for what you do understand and **don't get caught up in the difficult parts**. Skim over passages that are really difficult and mark or flag what you don't understand to re-read later. Even a partial understanding will make re-reading easier on your second attempt.
- **Ask yourself questions** about the reading. Work out what you do understand and what you do not. Try to make connections and associations between what you are reading and what you already know. Revisit the parts you found difficult. How do/ might they fit in with what you do understand?
- Are there **extra resources** that would help to improve your understanding?
  - If you need more background material, find an additional source.
  - If you're confused about discipline-specific terms or abbreviations, find a subject-specific dictionary and read with it on hand so you can look up important words.
  - If you're confused about vocabulary, read with an English dictionary on hand.
- It can help to **write while you read**. Underline, make notes, and/or write short summaries that help you concentrate and grasp difficult ideas.
- When you finish reading, **review to see what you have learned**, and reread those ideas that are not clear. Pause and try to restate difficult ideas in your own words.
- **Don't give up**. Complete your reading goal and don't get discouraged if there are parts you still aren't clear about. Some material is challenging and it's important to work towards understanding it. Ideas can become clearer the more you read.
- **If you still don't understand a reading, don't panic**. Set it aside, and read it again the next day. This gives your brain the chance to process the material. If the reading is still a challenge, talking ideas through often helps. Consult with your tutor or lecturer. Talk about it with other students.

(Adapted from Wood, N 1991, *College Reading and Study Skills*, Holt Rinehart and Winston, USA.)

## References

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