

WelTec/Whitireia Research Skills Series

Academic Reading



Academic reading is different to reading a novel or magazine. Academic texts tend to be quite complex and may contain a lot of technical vocabulary. Therefore, you need to approach academic reading differently to regular reading. Give yourself time to concentrate fully on what you are reading, make sure you are in a quiet place and read with a purpose. Don't worry if you don't understand everything you are reading the first time you try – it can take time to develop an understanding of academic texts. Be patient and follow the steps below to get the most out of your reading time.

Step 1: Identify your purpose

Before you start reading ask yourself why you are reading this text – what is it you want to find out? Is there something in particular you need for your assignment, such as a definition of a relevant phrase or an example? This will help you to know quickly whether it is worth investing the time in reading it.



Step 2: Skim the text

To check whether a book or source is relevant you need to **skim** through the text. This means reading quickly for **general meaning**. Your goal is to get an idea of what the whole text is about. Don't worry if there are parts you don't understand. Pay particular attention to the ideas in the abstract/executive summary, introduction and conclusion as well as the first sentences of each paragraph. These are the sections that will give you the overall ideas the writer is trying to express.



Step 3: Scan the text

Now it's time to scan the text for the key words or ideas you have identified as important.

Scanning means reading quickly to look for **specific phrases**. If you are using a book scan the index for your keywords. If you are reading an article or report scan the abstract or executive summary. Also move your eyes quickly down the page looking for words that are bold, italic, or a different colour.

Step 4: Make a decision

Now you need to decide if the text is useful to you – not all texts you come across in your research will be helpful for your assignment. Aim to be a strategic reader and not waste time reading texts that are not useful to you. If a text is too challenging, now might be a good time to do some extra research to find a simpler summary of the topic – you can then go back to the original when you know more about it. Alternatively, if you have decided the text looks useful go to Step 5.

Step 5: Detailed reading

This is when you take time to understand a text completely. When reading in detail:

- Read actively! Make notes or write symbols in the margins or on a separate paper.
- Read critically. Ask yourself questions while reading. For example: *What was the main idea? Do I agree or disagree? What is left out?*
- Summarise. After reading – either out loud or in writing – describe what the text was about.
- Take detailed notes – see the other side of this handout for some notetaking tips.

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How to Take Notes



Being able to take good notes will help with your study, particularly during the research process. See below for some tips and strategies to develop your note taking skills.

Reading journal

A reading journal is an effective way to keep your notes organised and easy to follow. It is a record of your reading, your ideas, new vocabulary and any questions you have. It can be used for lecture notes, assignment research and test revision. See a sample reading journal below:

Source
(where you
found the
information)
in APA
format.

Main ideas and
supporting
arguments –
can include
pictures,
quotes,
keywords and
page numbers

Notes	Comments
<p><i>Source: Falconer, K. H. (2011). Grieving in the Internet Age. New Zealand Journal Of Psychology, 40(3), 79-88.</i></p> <p>- Today in NZ more people use social media and the internet to show grief (Chch earthquake, Pike River, etc.)</p> <p>- online outlets connect grieving people and can be used to manage grief</p> <p>- Online grieving includes public expression, creation of permanent memorials (Facebook, Twitter)</p> <p>- Online resources can also be used to offer grief counselling (support groups, forums information) see chart p.83</p>	<p>?? Who - Age? Gender? Geography? Culture?</p> <p>Relates to Parkes, Bowlby grief phases - esp. yearning and searching for reunion (class Moodle slides 22/4)</p> <p>Is this as effective as face-face??</p>

Your thoughts –
make
connections to
other
texts/theories,
ask yourself
questions, agree
or disagree with
the writer.



Note Taking Tips

- Write down main points only, in your own words
- Use key words or short sentences
- Be brief and to the point
- Write down page numbers for pages that have important graphs, charts, and other detailed information