

Reading Strategies

Some people think of the act of reading as a straightforward task that's easy to master. In reality, **reading is a complex process** that draws on many different skills. Together, these skills lead to the ultimate goal of reading: **reading comprehension** or understanding what's been read.

Here are 9 essential skills needed for reading comprehension, and tips on what can help college students improve this skill.

1. Find a Distraction-Free Zone

While socializing in the student union may bring you joy, reading there does not suit everyone. The same goes for home, where the temptation to procrastinate makes scrolling social media or doing the dishes seem enjoyable. To prevent indulging in a distraction, consider heading to the library and temporarily disabling notifications.

2. Preview the Text

Doing a **quick skim** of the text allows you to form a general idea of the topic. Consider reading the headings and first sentence of each paragraph first as a preview. Then, read it a second time, but pay more attention to the details. Note what sections you stumble upon and fail to comprehend the first time and pay extra attention the second time.

3. Define Unfamiliar Terms

Consider setting up a shortcut on your computer that allows you to access an online dictionary quickly.

4. Identify the Main Idea and Themes

Many learners retain information better if they take notes. Consider handwriting or typing out the reading material's main idea in a **bullet point format**. Add to these notes during class lectures and review the final result before the exam. Using this method may prevent the necessity to reread the material a second time during the studying process.

5. Write Questions and Answers

If a question occurs to you while reading, don't anticipate that you will remember it come lecture day. Simply write it down and keep reading. You may find the answer in a later assigned chapter. If not, consider emailing it to your professor or asking it during the next class session.

6. Summarize the Text

In this step, try summarizing the main points of the reading into one paragraph and then narrow it down to one sentence. This will incorporate critical thinking skills and help your brain process the most vital information. Write this paragraph down, read it aloud, and memorize it. Then, do the same for the single sentence.

7. Pay Attention to the Visuals

Even if you don't identify as a visual learner, never skip over the graphics. Many professors include exam questions that refer directly to a graph or photo caption. Spend a few moments studying the textbook images, and then close your eyes and try to recall what you just looked at from memory.

8. Break Up the Reading

We know you didn't read it here first, but cram studying sessions fueled by procrastination rarely yield successful results. Do not try to read an entire unit's worth of reading the night before the exam. Breaking reading up into 15-30 increments per evening often works best.

9. Discuss What You've Read

Grab a friend, grab a coffee, and talk about your new knowledge. Although you can discuss what you read with a classmate, you can also bring specific educational topics up in casual conversations with anyone. Also, do not underestimate the power of engaging in classroom discussions. Not only will you rake in those participation points, but you may also retain more information and hear interesting viewpoints.

How to Improve Reading Speed and Comprehension

To keep up with course demands while fulfilling other life responsibilities, individuals must practice their speed reading skills. However, reading too quickly without comprehension strategies does not usually yield successful results. In the following sections, we discuss 4 speed reading methods that help students.

1. Stay Focused

Since most people have been reading since age five, many readers can think about other things while they speed read. However, a person must stay entirely focused on a text for complete comprehension, and anyone can train themselves to concentrate better and avoid multitasking. Reading quickly may prevent a mind from wandering, so speed reading can lead to better overall comprehension.

2. Skim the Text

Skimming a textbook helps prevent information overload. Students may also benefit from previewing a text by skimming before doing a thorough reading.

3. Impression, Association, and Repetition Method

This method for enhanced reading comprehension considers that memory involves three components. These components include impression, association, and repetition. When something makes an impression on a person, they likely remember it. An individual can increase a reading's impression on them by forming a mental image and exaggerating the scene in a shocking, memorable way.

For association, readers should try and form connections about details that relate to their everyday life. To remember a date, a reader could relate it to a friend's birthday. To utilize repetition, a reader should simply reread assignments.

5. SQ3R Method

Francis P. Robinson, an American educational psychologist, discovered this reading comprehension method in 1946. The acronym stands for survey, question, read, recite, and review. To utilize this method, learners should first skim headings, pictures, and bold words. Then, they should write down initial questions. Next comes the reading stage, which should fill in gaps and answer questions from the previous sections. Finally, reading aloud and then reviewing the sections further solidifies the acquired knowledge.

Q. What's the biggest challenge for students moving up to college-level reading?

Many students just haven't practiced. If students haven't read much before college, their background knowledge is limited. There's a significant drop-off in newspaper reading. That's a problem because the more you read, the more language you're exposed to.

Q. What's the biggest reading mistake students make?

There are a few. Avoidance of reading is a big problem. Some of it occasionally has to do with a learning disability. Some of it has to do with attention span. Most students just haven't had the practice. Reading is a skill you build up over time. Another one is that students will see unfamiliar words, and they just skip over them without looking up the words.

Q. How about note-taking while reading? What tactics should students use?

Too many students want to highlight. Highlighting is OK, but it can be coloring after a while. Writing a little summary in the margin is much more effective because it forces you to put the material in your own words. If you realize you can't summarize a section, that tells you to go back and read it again.