

Reading to Write: Active Reading Strategies

"If you don't have time to read, you don't have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that." — Stephen King

Reading is crucial to good university writing. In your written assignments, you must be able to synthesize and present information in a clear, logical way and provide evidence from reputable sources to strengthen your claims. Understanding your sources allows you to do this. When reading to write, your reading strategies should be more active. This means moving beyond a passive reading and re-reading of the material in order to understand, analyze and engage with the author's ideas.

Active reading involves

- Identifying = defining key terms and concepts
- Summarizing = finding the main ideas
- Annotating = recording your reactions to, interpretations of, and questions about a text as you read it
- Analyzing = closely examining details and ideas
- Synthesizing = connecting ideas; integrating ideas and information from multiple sources
- Evaluating = judging the quality/value of the information

As you read, engage in a conversation with the text you are reading. Being engaged in what you are reading will not only improve memory, retention, and knowledge, but it will also improve the level at which you think about the material.

Ask (and answer) questions like

- What are the most important points in this text?
- What argument(s) is the author making?
- Are the author's arguments well-reasoned and adequately supported?
- How does this material relate to what I have already learned in this class? In other classes? In other readings?
- How would I teach or explain this material to someone else?
- Does this material remind me of anything from my own life or experience?
- What are the underlying themes, concepts, and assumptions throughout the text?
- How important is this information in the context of this assignment and my research topic?

Considering questions like these allows you to focus on the most significant aspects of the material. Getting into the habit of reading actively each time you encounter a new text improves your ability to interpret information and strengthens your critical evaluation skills.