

## Tips for Reading and Listening

- I have a **quiet place** to read with good lighting.
- I **preview** the chapter or section before I start reading.
- I know the **purpose** of reading the material before I start.
- I **read actively** to get information from the material.
- I **highlight main points** after I have read a paragraph.
- I stop after every paragraph or section to **recall** what I have just read.
- I **mark difficult sections** that will need further review.
- I read material in **small chunks**.
- I **review** what I have read within 24 hours.
- I read with a **dictionary** nearby.
- I **vary my reading speed** depending on the complexity of the material.
- Before class I **skim the material** that will be taught to gain a basic overview.
- In class I **watch for cues** that indicate important information.
- As I listen I **compare new information** with what I already know.
- I **ask questions** in class if I am not clear on the material being presented.

## Reading to Remember

Reading scientific or technical material can be demanding. These strategies will help with understanding and retention of information.

- 1) **Preview** the chapter by looking over titles, introductions, subheadings, figures, diagrams, italicized or boldfaced words, and the summary or conclusion. Think about what you already know about the topic before you begin reading in detail. Look at the course objectives to determine the purpose of reading the material.
- 2) **Question:** Look ahead at assignment or end-of-chapter questions, or turn the boldfaced headings into as many questions as you think will be answered in the section. Keep the course objectives in mind when formulating questions.
- 3) Then **Actively Read**. Read to get the main concepts and focus on the material that is highlighted in your course outline and during lectures.
  - Read to **answer questions** or to find specific information.
  - **Visualize** what you are reading.
  - **Use a highlighter** but highlight no more than 10% of the text. It is best to read a paragraph first and then go back and highlight the main points.
  - Stop after reading every paragraph or subsection to **recall** what you have read. Tell it to yourself in your own words.
  - Write down **procedures in step form** in your own words.
  - Translate **abstract formulas into verbal** explanations.
  - Draw your own **diagrams or charts** to illustrate and explain problems, or to summarize material.
  - Try to read dense material in **small blocks**. For example, read one section in your textbook and then make some notes or do some questions related to it.
  - Try to see the **bigger picture** as you read. How does this material relate to other material in the course and in other courses? How will this material be useful in your field of study or career? How is it related to something you already know?

- Try to **make connections** between main ideas, supporting ideas and details.
  - **Vary your reading speed** depending on the difficulty of the material.
  - As you read **anticipate possible exam questions** and the responses.
  - Read with a **dictionary** nearby.
  - Try to create a **single study source**. Leave space in your lecture notes (a column on the left of your page, room at the bottom of the page or the back of the previous page in your notebook/binder) to supplement your notes with information from textbooks.
  - Continually **check your understanding** of the material. Mark any information you don't understand and make sure to get clarification from your instructor or classmates.
- 4) **Review**. To effectively retain new material review it within 24 hours and again within the week. Your review sessions should involve a strategy that will help you to remember and understand the material such as flash cards, summarized notes, diagrams or concept maps.
- 5) **Read ahead**. Skim the related chapter before class trying to pull out major ideas. Having a general idea of the material will help you to get more out of the lecture.

## Improving Your Study Reading Skills

Improving your reading skills really boils down to increasing your speed and improving your comprehension.

### How fast do I read now?

The average college student reads between 250 and 350 words per minute when reading fiction or other non-technical materials. A good reading speed to aim for is between 500 to 700 words per minute for this type of material. To determine your current reading rate take some non-technical reading material, such as a novel or long magazine article, mark the beginning of the selection, set a timer for 5 minutes and then mark where you get to when the timer rings. Count the number of words you have read and divide by 5 to determine your reading rate. Just reading faster will not improve reading comprehension however learning good reading techniques, such as reading groups of words at a time rather than mouthing individual words, will improve both speed and comprehension.

### How much am I comprehending?

Understanding the material you read is critical. If you just memorize information you will not be able to apply it on exams or in real life situations. A rough estimate of whether your comprehension is adequate is to jot down the main ideas from the 5-minute selection you just timed yourself on without referring back to the material. You should remember about one main idea per minute of reading, so if you can recall 5 main ideas your comprehension rate is good. It is a good idea to do this type of self-test regularly as you study read.

### What slows reading down?

Reading word by word, mouthing or vocalizing words, not sweeping your eyes ahead to the next words or the next lines soon enough, letting your eyes wander and poor concentration will slow your reading speed. Lack of reading practice and being in the habit of reading slowly are also common factors that decrease reading speed.

### How can I improve my reading rate?

- The key to increased reading rate is consistent practice. Set your target slightly higher than your initial reading rate and then practice at least 15 minutes each day, pushing yourself to read more quickly.

Check your rate every so often and increase by small increments as your reading rate improves.

- Practice moving your eyes more quickly over the text by taking the next 5 or 6 words into your vision and by moving your eyes more quickly to the next line.
- Some students find it helpful to read with an index card or ruler *above* the line they are reading (never use a ruler below what you are reading as this gets your eyes into the habit of moving slowly to the next line). Cover the line you have just read immediately to prevent yourself from re-reading. This helps improve concentration.
- NAIT has SpeedReader, a computer program designed to increase reading speed and comprehension, installed in several computers in the McNally Library. Staff at the library Help Desk can assist you.

### **How can I improve my comprehension?**

- Always read in a distraction-free environment. Set aside specific time to be used for study only. Turn off your cell phone and other distracting devices. Ensure that you are alert and relaxed.
- Read early in the day. Comprehension and concentration decrease when you are tired.
- With LOGs (Learning Outcome Guides) or course objectives in mind think about what specific questions you want to answer, what terms you need to learn and what concepts you need to understand.
- Read with the goal of understanding and remembering the material, not just of completing the chapter.
- Allow adequate time to read the chapter thoroughly.
- Skim the chapter first. Most textbooks are designed to help you by providing major headings, italicized or bold words, summaries, chapter questions, lists of main points and repetition of information.
- Read for a short interval (20 to 30 minutes), take a break and then read for another 20 to 30 minutes. Short intervals will improve comprehension due to recency and primacy effects (see page 22).
- Alternate subjects you read, and alternate reading with more active homework such as problem solving.
- Make sure you are reading in a quiet location that has appropriate heat, lighting and ventilation.
- Active listening will improve comprehension.

See a counsellor at NAIT Student Counselling for further assistance with reading concerns.

## Active Listening\*

By developing effective listening skills, you may get more out of lectures and reduce the amount of time you spend studying.

**The following techniques may help you become a better listener:**

- Show up for class with the intent to listen actively (as opposed to passively soaking in information).
- Learn the clues/cues your instructor gives to indicate he/she is sharing vitally important information (these may be certain words, phrases, gestures, voice inflection or tone of voice changes).
- Listen critically by silently questioning what you are hearing.
- Draw conclusions about what you are hearing (but keep an open mind).
- Think about relationships between new information and what you already know (this will enhance learning and recall).
- Ask questions. Clarify points you are unsure of.
- Be an “information filter” filtering out what is important and focusing less on the minor details (always tie information back to course objectives or LOGs).
- Display openness by your facial expression and body position (sit up straight and lean slightly forward to convey interest).
- It is beneficial to skim read the material the night before class. Reading or skimming ahead gives you an overview of the material which will help you to understand the lecture content more thoroughly.

*\*Adapted from “Study Smarter not Harder” by Kevin Paul, M.A*