



The Weissman Center for Leadership and the Liberal Arts
The Speaking, Arguing, and Writing Program
122 Porter Hall

Tips for Effective Reading

Before you start the reading:

- Make sure you are ready to concentrate. Find the most effective place to study, and use this place regularly.
- Reread the syllabus and think about past midterms, quizzes, and papers: What is the overall theme of the reading? Remember, professors choose assignments that are related to the topic you are studying! If you don't understand why the assignment is relevant, ASK the professor!
- Skim the text for repeated terms and words of interest. This helps provide a framework from which you can identify and focus on the key points in the reading.
- Don't forget to look at the background information: What do you already know about this topic? What do you know about the author? Where is the reading coming from?

While you are reading:

- Split up the reading so you can stay focused.
- Keep a pen handy to make comments as you read. Hint: A coding system helps to save time! Try using question marks when you're confused and exclamation marks when you are surprised or disagree with the author.
- Summarize important paragraphs by jotting down notes next to them. When you've finished the reading, these short paragraphs will help you tie together the major themes.
- Ask yourself, "Can I describe what is being said in each paragraph?"
- If you are having trouble understanding or absorbing a text, try reading aloud.
- Don't get too caught up in difficult vocabulary, but look up unfamiliar words that you read repeatedly. Move on if you understand the major theme.
- Sometimes it helps to skip to the conclusion, which usually summarizes the key points.
- You should have an opinion about the reading. Disagree or agree with the author, and be sure to ask questions!

When you have finished the reading:

- When you have finished a chapter or specific section, write notes about the major themes and ideas.
- Use the comments you made while reading to outline the article.
- If you had to read multiple articles or books, try to tie them together through common concepts found throughout the different texts.
- Again, refer to the syllabus and past assignments: What are the main themes that the reading addressed?
- When you're done, ask yourself: "What do I think about the reading? What do I think about this topic or idea? Do I agree or disagree with the author? What would the author say about what I want to say?"

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/go/saw>

For an appointment, call x2651