



Reading and Note-taking

Gamble Library

Academic reading

Academic reading is different to reading for pleasure, which is passive. Academic reading requires active engagement with the text and purposeful note-taking. This Gamble Guide explores strategies to support effective academic reading and note-taking.

What to read?

You may be expected to complete assigned weekly readings before lectures and seminars. Set readings will usually be in your module outline or on the VLE. Make sure you stick to deadlines when it comes to required reading for your module. Set targets to stay on track.

Your resource list will also outline 'Core' and 'Recommended' resources which you will be expected to read. There may also be recommended reading for essays, or just general further reading. You need to schedule time to read for your assessments. Reading around a subject will give you a better understanding of it. The resources listed in the weekly readings and resource list should be the first place you look for reading material to give you an understanding of a topic, or to read around an assessment question. You could also look for high quality, scholarly reading material in:

- The footnotes and bibliographies of the books in the resource list you were given. If the titles sound relevant it would be advisable to look at them
- Search [the library catalogue](#) for resources on a particular topic (title or keyword/subject search)
- Search Atla databases for articles, or, if applicable, our other databases, (Early English Books Online, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford English Dictionary). Peer reviewed journal articles are best. These can be selected when you do a search of Atla
- [Google scholar](#) may help but ensure that the articles and books returned in searches are peer reviewed and scholarly.

Target your reading

If you are reading for research for an assessment you will probably not need to read the source in full. For sources you think might be relevant:

- Read the introduction and conclusion
- Scan the contents page and index to see which chapters or sections will be most relevant to your research
- If you are using an e-book or electronic resource, use the search function to see if, and where, keywords you are researching are mentioned.

If nothing of relevance is returned, move on to the next resource. If you find relevant material read it and take notes. These questions will allow you to decide how much of the resource is worth reading:

- How does the resource and its arguments relate to your subject or research question?
- Does it support the argument you would like to make, or does it challenge it?
- How does it connect to other resources you have read?



While a resource may discuss a subject you are researching, it may not mention the argument you want to make. It may however be useful to read it as background information to support your research.

The SQW3R Method

The SQW3R method is a structured approach to reading that can help you identify the most relevant content to actively read. SQW3R stands for:

1. Survey
2. Question
3. Read and Write
4. Recall
5. Review

Survey

This is identifying the most relevant reading material as discussed in 'What to read?' It is also about considering whether you are ready to read the text. If you are unable to understand the content you may need to consult guides, introductions, dictionaries or encyclopedia before reading the text.

Start with the book's table of contents, or section headings in an article. If there are boxes around important text, words or sections in italics or bold, you will know these are being emphasized by the author. Also watch out for images or diagrams and their captions which sometimes summarize key ideas. These will help you see how a text relates to the subject and gauge if the information in the text is relevant to your assessment.

Question

Identify questions you want to answer with your reading, as well as general questions you can ask yourself to help deepen your understanding. You could put these on sticky notes so that they are nearby as you read.

The survey of the text may have given you some questions, as well as identifying unfamiliar vocabulary. Ask how the reading relates to previous reading and learning. General questions include:

- What is the reasoning behind the author's claims?
- Why has the author used these examples to support their point?
- What perspective is the author bringing to the text? What is their ideological position?

Read and Write

Read the text in more detail, writing notes in your own words rather than copying exactly what is on the page. This will deepen your understanding and prevent you running into problems with plagiarism. Focus on your questions from the last step and see if you can answer these. If you are reading a weekly reading for class, keep a note of unanswered questions to bring to class for discussion.

Try to identify the main idea in each paragraph. It is usually near the start of the paragraph, before the author gives evidence to support it. You could summarise the key point made in each paragraph in a list. This will help you understand the overall structure of the work and the direction of the argument, while identifying gaps in the author's reasoning which you may want to critically analyse.

You may need to re-read a section to get a good grasp of complex ideas, or if it is a key section. As you re-read note anything further down which you need to. Is it still confusing? Would a dictionary or encyclopedia help explain any of the words or concepts you are unsure of?

Recall

Put your reading material away. Close the book or browser. On a fresh piece of paper or in a new Word document, write down the key points contained in what you read in your own words. Return to your notes



or the original text and see what you missed. Did you leave out anything crucial or misconstrue an argument? Re-read the key parts of the text to check.

At this stage identify a few key quotations and add these to your notes, ensuring you record page numbers or URL details. This is so you can reference these correctly in assessments.

Review

Review your questions, notes and ability to remember the information. What information have you gathered and how does it help you answer your questions?

Reflect on, and identify, any further reading which you may need to do, either to understand what you have read more fully, or to find more relevant information for your research.

What is your own position? Given your research do you agree with the claims the author makes? Is there any more research you would need to do in order to decide?

Are there any perspectives or ideas you think are missing from the reading you have done? What connections can you make to the other material you have read?

Pomodoro Method

The Pomodoro Method is designed to help you focus while reading.

1. Choose your reading task, deciding how much time you realistically have to spend on it.
2. Set a timer for 25 minutes and read for this length of time without any other distractions. Put your phone away!!! Read until the alarm sounds.
3. Take a 5-minute break. This is the first Pomodoro round completed.
4. Set the timer again and read for another 25 minutes, without distractions, then take another 5-minute break.
5. Repeat two more rounds, taking a longer break after a total of four 'Pomodoro' rounds.

Note-taking in class

Make a note of key points from the lecture during the session. Do not be a perfectionist – scribble down key points so you do not miss anything important. The main thing is that you are able to read and understand your notes when you re-read them later. You could develop your own shorthand to help you get information noted as quickly as possible. Make sure you note the name of the lecture and date so your notes are organized. Experiment with note-taking methods. Mind maps, concept maps, or outlines might work better for you.

After the lecture write a summary of the key points without consulting your notes to check how much you have retained. Compare the summary with your notes and reconcile differences. Note down questions you may still have so that these can be followed up at the next lecture or through your reading.