

Student Success Guides: Reading to Learn

SAINT JOSEPH'S ONLINE



Use this Student Success Guide to develop better reading skills.

For many people who have either been out of the classroom for many years, or perhaps never taken a college course, reading at the college level is an entirely new experience. Even though you have been reading for years, academic reading can be overwhelming and difficult for some people. College level reading requires different strategies from day-to-day reading. The goal is to develop a system that works well for you.

Helpful Hints when Reading

1. Read sitting up and with good light.
2. Keep background noise and other distractions to a minimum.
3. Keep paper and pen within reach for note taking.
4. Break long reading assignments into segments, reading a few pages at a time, taking a break, and then returning to read again.
5. Read and study in the same place.
6. Set time limits.

Vocabulary

In the process of learning you will encounter words that will not initially be familiar to you. Knowledge is gained largely through words, and learning new words facilitates learning. The more you read, the more words you will come in contact with.

1. Use your new vocabulary in your everyday communication whenever possible.
2. Become familiar with the glossary of your textbook, if one is available.
3. Become familiar with the dictionary since it will assist you with both the proper pronunciation and meaning of words.
4. Try to learn 3-5 new words a day from what you are learning.

Myths about Reading

There are several myths about reading that often challenge the college student.

Myth #1: Reading Once is Enough

Many students feel that there must be something wrong with them if they have to read a chapter or section more than once. This is not so. Most successful students skim what they have to read and then go back and read more thoroughly a second or even a third time until they grasp the content of the assignment.

Myth #2: I Must Read Every Word

Many words used in writing grammatically correct sentences actually convey no meaning so you do not need to spend significant effort in concentrating on them.

Myth #3 I Should Not Skip Passages in Reading

Many students feel compelled to read every passage that is written in every text assigned to them. This is not necessarily needed to grasp the understanding of the assignment. This, of course, will require a judgment call on your part as to what is worth spending your time on and what is not, but some passages may need only a quick glance rather than full concentrated reading effort.

Underlining and Highlighting

Underlining or highlighting passages may benefit many students, but some also spend too much time doing this or end up marking nearly all of the text thinking that every word is important, which defeats the purpose of doing this in the first place. Read the complete paragraph or section first before you begin marking the text. This will give you an idea as to what is important and will insure that you do not mark more than is necessary. Underline or highlight only keywords or small phrases; it is easier to review a few items or key phrases.

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PSQ5R

PSQ5R is a formula that stands for the basic steps in learning from reading in an efficient manner. Following this formula may help you successfully complete your reading assignments.

P = Purpose S = Survey Q = Question

5 R = Read Selectively, Recite, Reduce-record, Reflect, and Review

PSQ

Purpose

Establish the purpose of the reading assignment. For instance, the purpose in using the telephone book is specific; once you find the number you are looking for you stop "reading." In reading a paper or a chapter, your purpose must be determined prior to your reading the first word. The purpose may be to get the theme of the story, main ideas, methods, facts of a case, figures, arguments, etc. Once you determine the purpose your reading will be more efficient and effective.

Survey (skim)

You should survey (skim) the item to be read to get an overview of the material. Skim the introduction or preface, table of contents, chapter titles, subheadings, first and last paragraphs, glossary, and review questions (if any) to find out what the subject matter is that is being discussed. This should take no more than a few minutes to gain the focus or perspective of the item to be read.

Question

Create questions that you hope to answer by the time you have finished your reading. This will encourage you to read actively in search of the answers. Here are some sample questions that you might consider.

1. What do I already know about this topic? 2. Use the first heading/subheading to create a question that you will be seeking the answer to.

5 Rs

Read Selectively

Read to find the answers to your questions. Sometimes reading the first sentence of each paragraph will provide the answers you are looking for. Look for the main ideas, information, etc. that will meet your purpose. In some cases, however, you may have to read each paragraph carefully to understand the text before you proceed to the next paragraph or section.

Recite

Recite the answers to your question without looking at the text. Use your own words and thoughts as much as possible. If you cannot do this, then you need to review that section once again.

Reduce-record

Create a brief outline of the question and its answer(s). Use keywords or phrases; keep it simple to make studying easier. By paraphrasing or outlining the information, your understanding and retention will increase.

Reflect

Reflecting on what you have just read and synthesized is important to learning. Connect the new information with what you have already learned and your personal experiences, or mentally organize it or reorganize it in outline form.

Review

Review the "reduced-recorded" notes of what you have read. This may lead to an overall organization of the entire assignment notes. Reviewing your previous reading notes a few minutes each day, and again every week for more important material, will increase your retention of the new information.

Check out more tips in the GPS Student Orientation

Saint Joseph's College of Maine
(800)-343-5498 sjcme.edu/online