

HOW TO READ LOTS OF STUFF FOR GRAD SCHOOL

Effective graduate-level reading is an active exercise. When you sit down to read, make sure you are mentally present, not likely to be distracted, and have prepared to fully immerse yourself in the material.

1. SKIM

First get the “big picture” by reading the title, key words, and abstract or introduction; this will tell you the central argument and objectives, and why they matter.

- Quickly scan the reading without taking any notes; focus on headings and subheadings.
- Make a mental note of the main sections and progression of the reading.
- Spend a little time looking highlighted content, such as tables, figures, and text boxes.

2. READ

Now read the piece - quickly - but with attention to important aspects, asking yourself questions such as:

- What problem(s) is the author addressing?
- What are the central concepts the author is highlighting?
- What are the main skills or strategies that I can take away from the reading?

3. PROCESS

Mentally compare the new content with what you knew about the subject previously, integrating the reading's lessons to augment your understanding.

- What new information, strategies, or ways of considering the topic does the reading provide?
- In light of the reading, in what ways is your understanding of the topic altered, improved, or reinforced?
- What questions do you still have about the subject, and what new questions has the reading prompted?

4. SUMMARIZE

Synthesize the lessons of the reading and how your understanding has changed in writing - in the margins of the paper or book, in a notepad, or on your computer.

- Take notes: it improves reading comprehension and helps you remember key points.
- Highlight or underline key terms or phrases and make written notes regarding why they are important.
- Record the most valuable take-aways and clearly articulate how the reading has altered or improved your understanding of the topic at hand.

Finally, be sure to compile and save your synthesized reading notes in a manner that you will be able to find them a week, month, or year from the time of the reading.