

Reading Made Easy: Effective Reading Strategies for Online Learning



In online courses, you are required to do a lot of readings before class, to complete the assignments or prepare for the tests. Reading is not just taking in information; there are ways to help you read effectively and better understand the content.

Active reading is key to accessing content knowledge, processing meaning, and developing deep conceptual understanding in every subject. There are some useful active reading strategies to help you read actively and effectively, no matter if you are reading a textbook, a lab manual, an online article, or watching a video for your course.

First, you can take a look at our [Active Reading Checklist](#) and see what strategies you are already using while reading. Check off the ones that you use and try to think over the ones that you don't. Next time when you read, try to use some of these new strategies. Below are some other effective strategies for you to try out. Click on the links for detailed explanations and examples.

- [Annotation](#)

Simply put, annotating means taking notes on a text. It requires the reader to actively engage with the text by writing comments, questions, describing, paraphrasing, summarizing, outlining, underlining, highlighting, and even drawing.

- [Cornell Notetaking](#)

Cornell Notetaking is a straight-forward strategy for organizing and reviewing notes. In brief, you will divide your page into three places to write down facts, questions, and to summarize. A favorite among educators, this technique has been proven to make learning more efficient and to make reviewing notes much easier.

- [Text Preview](#)

Surprisingly, previewing is a big time-saver. This strategy prepares your brain for the information you're about to read, helps you focus, and enhances comprehension. Previewing involves skimming the text and looking for various features such as headings, subheadings, graphs, vocabulary words, and chapter questions.

- **INSERT**

INSERT gives you four easy-to-remember symbols to help you annotate and monitor your thinking as you read.

- **Dual coding**

Dual coding combines written material with visuals in order to read and learn more effectively. The idea is that by providing two different representations of the information, verbal and visual, you will better understand the material.

- **Retrieving by retelling**

Read, cover, remember, retell! This is a simple method that will help you remember more information and know where the gaps are in your comprehension.

Questions you might have:



Q: What if I am a slow reader?

A: Often times, the people who read slowly are the ones who absorb the most information. Surprisingly, [Text Preview](#) is one of the best ways to speed up your reading. If you are a slow reader or the reading is relatively long, you can break it into smaller sections. You can set a certain amount of time to complete one section at a time. Soon you will see yourself achieving your reading goal. Also, try to find a quiet place to minimize distractions the next time you read.

Q: What if I have to do a lot of readings and assignments at the same time? What should I do first?

The standard way of studying is to finish one topic and learn it thoroughly before moving to the next. This method is called blocking. However, when you have a lot of reading and multiple topics to cover, it's hard to recall the older information that you have read if you read in blocks.

When reading and studying multiple topics in the same or related subject areas, instead of reading in blocks, you can try [interleaving](#) to help you retain information and improve your comprehension by connecting ideas and concepts. When you interleave, you [mix topics](#) and subjects while you study (following, for example, the pattern "ABCABCABC"). This strategy allows you to retrieve information, extract rules, and transfer them to multiple areas of learning.

When you have a lot of assigned readings, it's more productive to take [study breaks](#) rather than reading continuously for several hours and cramming a large amount of information. After taking a

break, doing some exercise or getting a healthy snack, you may find yourself understanding the text better when you return to reading.

Q: *What if the reading is difficult?*

When the text is difficult to understand, the first thing you can do is to read aloud. This can help you process the sentences better. It can also increase your attention span and improve your visual memory as you build connections between the written and oral words.

At City Tech, over 50% of the students find the assigned readings difficult because of **unfamiliar vocabulary words**. To tackle this, you can 1) try to define the word by looking at the context clues. Read the sentence again, along with the preceding and following sentences, and 2) look up the definitions in a dictionary or the glossary, if you have one in your book.

Another way to approach a difficult text is after you have read the text (or a portion of it), **paraphrase (look away and retell** the information in your own words) or **summarize** the content by stating the main point of the text and the key supporting points.

INSERT is a simple strategy for you to interact with the text and monitor your thinking as you read. **Rereading** and **adjusting your reading speed** are also great ways to handle a difficult text. Finally, **asking thoughtful questions** about the text can help you understand the reading better.

Q: *What if I have a hard time concentrating while reading?*

A: Following Benjamin Franklin’s advice, one of the best ways to improve your concentration is to **read with a pen in hand**. An all-time favorite practice that can help you concentrate is to **annotate** the text (underline, circle, highlight, or add comments). Not only does it keep you stay focused, but it also improves your comprehension. If you are reading a downloaded PDF, you can use some digital tools to annotate the text. Here’s an [example](#).

To make the text more manageable, you can organize the information by drawing **graphs, charts, maps**, etc. Doing this will help you classify information, focus on specific details, and figure out the relationships among terms and concepts. Pairing reading with visual representations engages more use of your senses, which can yield better concentration.



You can combine these strategies as you read and use them freely to tackle your reading problems. Happy reading!