

# 7 Reading efficiently

## In this section:

- identify different reasons for reading
- use different reading styles
- choose the right reading style to suit your needs
- reduce the time spent reading
- increase understanding and recall

## Reading efficiently

Reading efficiently is an important skill that will benefit all of your studies.

There are several skills involved with this process, including:

- the actual reading itself;
- prioritizing the information; and
- recording that information in a useful way.

This section will help you minimize the time you spend reading by helping you to read more efficiently.



## Why are you reading?

We read for many different reasons and purposes. The reading that you do for your studies is often different from reading for leisure.

Perhaps the most important difference is the way in which you actually work through the materials. For example, you open a novel at the first page and read right through to the end.



However, in an academic textbook you might only refer to a particular chapter, or flip through for a diagram or chart containing the information you require.

In each case, you are reading for different reasons. Why are they different?

These two ways of reading suit different needs. When you read for leisure, you often need do nothing but enjoy what you are reading and pass the time. Reading for study, however, has to inform you of particular issues, and you will need to apply this knowledge when you are working on your assignments. It is easy to forget the contents of the novel you read recently, but your academic reading needs to reinforce your knowledge constantly.

## Passive reading

Often the reason why you have not retained the detail from a novel is that you have been reading passively.

In other words, you have been passing the time or filling spare moments by following a linear thread. You let the book guide you — you follow the story.

Clearly this approach is rather limited for effective study.

## Active reading

Active reading is when you actually make demands of the text, where you deliberately search for a particular strand among all the information it contains.

Reading becomes most active when you are pursuing the answer to a question.

For example:

- How can I read more efficiently?
- What reading skills will I need to develop?
- Is all reading the same?
- Do I need to read everything?





## Example of reading questions

If you establish reading goals, posing questions that you need answering, you will read more effectively.

*What will this article tell me about pit latrines?*

This question is too general to be of much help; it does not help you to sort and 'pigeonhole' the information, but leaves you with the same disordered mass that you started with.

The questions below are more specific and should allow you to file the information in an ordered way in your mind.

- What is a pit latrine?
- How does a pit latrine work?
- In what situations can pit latrines be used?
- When are pit latrines not suitable?
- What problems are encountered with the use of pit latrines?
- What are the advantages of pit latrines?
- What are the disadvantages of pit latrines?

## Prioritizing information

Reading goals will help you to prioritize the information you read. You should only read that information which seems necessary, asking such questions as:

- What is centrally relevant?
- What is partially relevant? and
- What is irrelevant?

This will help you learn more in the process, enhancing your ability to retain relevant information

We have prioritized the module notes for you, at least as far as we can. They are comprehensive, however; so if you already have a background knowledge of some of the topics, you will need to prioritize your reading still further.

## Reading with a pen or keyboard

When you are reading for your studies you will need to take notes, sifting out information that will be of use both in the long and short term.

It is, therefore, essential that you 'read with a pen' (or computer keyboard) and actively take notes throughout your reading.

There are many ways of ordering and structuring your notes. These can be found in Section 8 of this guide: Making notes.

## Different ways of reading

As we established at the start of this section, there are different modes of reading – either reading fully from beginning to end, or flicking through until you find the piece of information you want.

Once you have established your reading goals, you can choose the mode of reading most suited to your task, which will make your reading more efficient.

Choose the method to match the task.

The following types of reading are commonly used. You are likely to recognize many of them:

### Skimming (or browsing)

The main aim is to discover how useful the text or book might be and for what purpose you wish to use it. Skimming involves going through a text rapidly, probably at two or three times your normal reading speed, and being selective.



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Look at the index, chapter headings, introductory and concluding paragraphs, as well as skimming through the main content by reading the first line of each paragraph. This will give you a feel for the 'flavour' of the book.

Skimming is useful for deciding whether you are going to use the book, in much the same way that you would flip through a book or magazine to see if you are going to buy it.

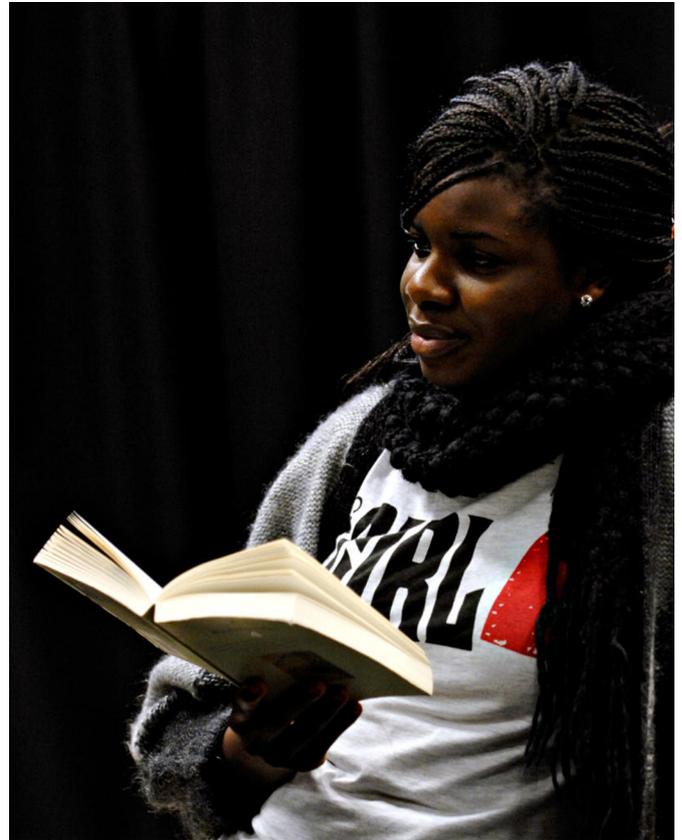
It will also help you get some idea of the way the text is organized, its tone and style, to get the gist of the writer's meaning or to review something you have already read, refreshing your memory.

### Scanning

Scanning is used when you know exactly what you are looking for – for example, a telephone number in a telephone directory or the times of trains in a timetable. It is little more than a visual matching task; find the name you are searching for and then follow the text across to find the number or time.

### Search reading

Search reading is used to look for key words and phrases which will help you locate specific information. Look in the index to find the location of key words and topics, then locate these in the main body of the text by passing your eyes



through your text until you find the words or phrases you are interested in. Words and phrases which are not closely related need no more than a passing glance. Remember to be flexible as the author's key words may not be the same as yours. When reading electronic documents on a computer you can often automatically set up a 'search' of the document for certain words and phrases.

### Receptive reading

This is used when you need a good general understanding or to discover accurately what has been written, and is the reading style most appropriate for assimilating the information contained within the WEDC module notes. Reading receptively may also be used to give you 'food for thought', or prompt you to think creatively and reflectively.

When reading receptively, you need time to pay close attention to the text, perhaps allowing for periods in which to reflect on what you have read, working through the text in sequence, at a moderate speed. You will probably have skimmed through the text previously to see what it contains. Also, take appropriate notes of your own.

Remember that even with this type of reading practice you can improve your reading speed without affecting your level of comprehension.





### The amount of reading required for a module

WEDC expects distance learners to read all of the module notes, the self-assessment questions and answers and usually all of the additional resources books (unless you are told otherwise).



We do not expect you to read all of each text book recommended for a module. Certain parts of the text book will usually be referred to in the module notes and you should look at these parts. It may be helpful to read other parts of the text book (or USB stick resources) to help you with assignments or to find answers to questions you have about a topic. You should be able to find relevant sections by 'skimming', 'scanning' or 'searching'.

### Summary

Efficient reading is more than simply reading everything at a greater speed. You will save more time if you ask why you are reading and adopt a reading strategy to suit that need. This process will also help you learn more from the texts you are reading, offering a clear focus, enhancing your comprehension and recollection.

### Checklist



#### Establish a purpose for your reading

- Define reading goals

#### Ask questions of the text

- Why are you reading?
- What exactly are you looking for?

#### Adopt a reading style that reflects your needs

#### Be methodical

- Do not simply read for long periods — plan your activities for each text and each subject.

#### Prioritize information

- What is centrally relevant?
- What is partially relevant? and
- What is irrelevant?

#### If you can, control your environment

- Make sure you have sufficient light, but avoid glare.
- Reading is best done with light coming from above or over one shoulder, and it should not be reflected back at you. Avoid too harsh a contrast between your reading pool and the light in the surrounding area.
- If you suffer from eyestrain or headaches, take regular breaks.

Remember to adopt a comfortable reading position and posture to reduce body fatigue and mental strain. This will enable you to work more effectively and, if necessary, for longer.

