

Reading summary

As an independent adult learner, you need to take responsibility for your own learning. One way to do this is to develop your reading strategies and manage your reading load.

Reading at university

The purpose of reading

CDU recommends that you spend 10-12 hours per week on each unit; however, classes may take up only 3-4 hours. As an independent learner, you are expected to spend the rest of the time reading, researching and doing assignments. Reading helps you to:

- build your foundational knowledge of your discipline
- prepare for classes
- research information for assignments
- explore topics in more depth.

What to read

At the beginning of each semester, you should start by locating the readings for your units. Look for the reading list icon in the Student Portal. You may also find other information about what to read in your Learnline unit, including your weekly topics and a list of prescribed, recommended, and additional weekly readings. It is important to manage your reading load. Your lecturer may not tell you or remind you to do any reading. As an independent adult learner, you are expected to keep up to date with the readings.

Text types at university

At university, you will read a range of different text types, including text books, specialized academic books, journal articles, research reports, and manuals. Each type has a different purpose and structure. Your reading will be more efficient if you know the common text types on your reading list and how these text types are organised. For instance, Business students may read more annual reports, while Psychology students may read more diagnostic manuals. Try to identify the specific features of texts in your discipline. For instance, almost all research reports begin with an abstract.

Reading sub-skills

To manage a heavy reading load, you should not approach every text the same way. You need to read strategically, so it is useful to have a range of different approaches you can apply depending on the purpose of your reading.

Skimming and scanning

We skim texts when we read very quickly to get a *general overview* of the main ideas. We scan texts when we read very quickly to search for *specific information*.

When you skim a long text, such as a research article, you may get an overview by quickly reading:

- titles, headings and sub-headings
- the abstract
- images and diagrams
- introductions and conclusions

- paragraph topic sentences.

When you scan, you use your knowledge of how the text is organised to quickly locate the information you need. You can find the information you need more quickly if you predict what you might find, such as a statistic or quotation.

Remember: after you skim or scan a text, you can decide which sections to read in more detail.

Intensive reading

We read intensively to get a good understanding of a text and when we are trying to remember what we have learned. However, we usually only intensively read selected sections of longer texts after we have identified what is relevant to our needs. You may intensively read:

- assignment instructions to ensure you understand exactly what you need to do
- specific, useful sections of research articles or textbook chapters after skimming or scanning
- class notes and lecture slides covering test material.

In these situations, you need a solid understanding of the content. When we read with concentration, it can be helpful to find a quiet place and have a notebook to take notes.

Reading with purpose

As we have noted, the reading load at university can be challenging. As an independent adult learner, you need to manage your time and read efficiently. It is also important to be an active reader; this means you have a purpose for reading the text and critically engage with the text so that you understand it at a deeper level.

Here are some common purposes for reading:

- To prepare for class – your aim is to become familiar with basic concepts, make connections between ideas in your readings and your lectures, or to share your opinions and clarify uncertainties
- To write an assignment – your aim is to understand the task requirements, review the unit content, and produce an assignment that fulfils your lecturer's expectations
- To learn content – your aim is to build knowledge in your field of study. You can apply a range of strategies to achieve this, such as note-taking and using the SQ3R approach.
- To improve your writing – your aim is to critically analyse how other authors structure their texts and express themselves to develop your own writing in your discipline

Critical reading

It is important to understand that critical reading does not necessarily mean criticising an author. It is another way of saying you should engage with, and evaluate, what you are reading. Here are some strategies you could try:

The Know What approach

Before you read, ask yourself

- What do I think I know?
- What do I want to know?

After you read, ask yourself

- What do I know now?
- What do I want to know next?

Critical questioning

Approaching your reading with a critical eye will result in a deeper understanding of the text. Here are some strategies to develop this skill. This is just a summary - detailed resources are available in the Study Skills pages.

When selecting a text to read, use the CRAAP test. This focuses on *currency, relevance, accuracy* and *purpose* to help you identify quality sources.

When reading research, use a questioning approach with each section. For example, in the Introduction and Literature Review, you should ask if the aim of the research is clear, and if the research builds on previous studies. In the Methods section, you should ask what theoretical framework is being used, and if the study design is clear and appropriate.

When evaluating an argument, your first questions should help you identify what the writer's position is and how it is justified. For each argument put forward by the author, you should ask yourself is the point clear and how it is supported. Are all perspectives presented? Is there any bias in the opinions being expressed? Are any unfair assumptions? You should also reflect on your own feelings towards the topic and whether the views presented are consistent with other texts you have read.

Managing reading challenges

Managing unknown vocabulary

Although it is useful to have a good dictionary (either online or a paper dictionary), your reading speed will be reduced if you stop to check each word you're not familiar with. You can often work out the meaning from the information in the surrounding sentences. Also, good writers often give a quick definition or examples of the word. When you do come across a new word, make a note of it so you are actively building your vocabulary.

Managing your reading load

The amount of reading at university can be challenging. By using some of the strategies in this summary, you will already be able to manage your reading more effectively. However, every student is different, so you will need to develop your own approach. Some things to consider are when and where you study best; how much noise and distraction you can deal with; your schedule and work/family obligations; your concentration levels; your knowledge of reading strategies such as the pomodoro technique; and knowing the support resources available to you at CDU.

AI tools for reading

While you are at university, you may hear about AI tools which are designed to help you with your reading. They can simplify or summarise texts for you. However, it is important that you understand the limitations of such tools. AI generated texts may oversimplify concepts and lose nuance from the original text. The summaries of complex texts may be inaccurate or misinterpret key points. The overuse of AI tools also prevents you from developing your own critical reading skills.