



READING, WRITING, & EXAMS

Below are suggestions for improving reading, writing and exam skills. If you find you are struggling with academic skills, contact the Counseling and Testing Center by calling or visiting our website to learn more about the many services available, such as an appointment with an Academic Specialist.

Reading Skills

Skimming & Scanning

Skimming & scanning enable you to select material(s) which should be read and/or discarded. It can be useful to quickly determine main idea, locate facts, answer test items and chapter questions. Use skimming & scanning to:

- Fix intent for reading (or facts sought) clearly in your mind.
- Scan table of contents, chapter headings and subheadings.
- Quickly move eyes over reading material-focusing upon page headings and subheadings, discarding information that is obviously not related to reading intent. Skimming reading rates should be twice as fast as average reading speed.
- Selectively omit portions of reading material.
- Locate as quickly as possible the key or topic sentence of each paragraph (usually, but not always, the first sentence).
- Locate information—repeated practice will increase speed. Read carefully the last paragraph for summary information. Remember to carefully review tables, charts and any side boxes

The SQ3R + Reading Method

- **SURVEY:** Preview the assignment/material to be studied by scanning the text quickly to discover the author's central concept.
- **QUESTION:** What you need to learn in terms of what, why, how, when, who and/or where to support the central concept. Write these questions down to remember them.
- **READ:** Read specifically to answer the questions. Most paragraphs contain one or more main ideas in support of that concept. Locate and highlight them with a marker. Make notes in the margins summarizing key points.
- **RECALL:** Pause periodically (every 15 minutes or so) to recall in your own words a summary of what you have read: what the important ideas or concepts are and how the

test, examples, graphs, charts or illustrations support them. Write on notepaper as much as you can recall about what you have read and learned!

- REVIEW: Did you answer your questions, understand the new material and accomplish your goal? Reread difficult parts, work a few more problems.

Exam Strategies

- PREPARATION: Learn the exam format: e.g. facts vs. concepts; review course outline and notes; review previous tests; summarize highlights on single sheet.
- MEMORY DUMP: At the beginning of the test write down on scrap paper everything you remember—formulas, facts, names, etc; scan the test questions; then do second memory dump and begin the test.

Objective Exams

- Scan the exam to determine types of questions asked.
- Always read & follow directions!
- Determine the exam's scoring rules and use them. If wrong answers are penalized, don't guess unless you can reduce the choices to two.
- Answer easy questions first; mark difficult questions and return to them later.
- True-False Questions: Pick out key words or group of words on which the truth or falsity of a statement hinges. If any clause in a statement is false, the statement is false.
- Multiple-choice questions: Multiple choice questions are essentially true-false questions arranged in groups. Usually only one alternative is totally correct. Eliminate obvious false choices, and then pick the alternative that answers most fully all aspects of the question.

Essay Exams

- Planning your time in answering essay questions is more important than in objective type tests!
- Read through the entire examination first. Get a feel for the questions you are expected to answer. If the exam allows you to choose from several questions, be sure to number your answers exactly to match the questions.
- Follow directions carefully. Pay attention to the key words in the question. Words such as "list," "describe," "compare and contrast," and "outline" require different types of answers. Don't "write around" questions but answer directly and concisely.
- Outlining: After scanning the list of questions to be answered, choose the ones you know most about. On scrap paper quickly prepare an outline of important ideas and facts to be included in your response. Your opening statement summarizes what you are going to say. What follows should support your opening statement. Your conclusion should show how your body text supported your opening statement.
- It is essential that your ideas can be read and understood. Make your handwriting easy to read; know and use correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Themes & Reports

Reducing Writing Anxiety

- **GET A CALENDAR OR ACADEMIC PLANNER:** First write down the due date for the paper. Next, count backwards. How many days will you need to edit, re-write, revise, write, take notes, research, read, select, and narrow the topic? Now you know what day you will need to begin the paper. Review and revise this process after each paper.
- **BE SURE TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOUR INSTRUCTOR EXPECTS.**
- **DON'T BE AFRAID TO EXPRESS A UNIQUE OPINION.** The key is to document and support your ideas in an organized and cogent manner.
- **WHEN PROOFREADING TEXT,** start at the end of your paper. Read one sentence at a time and work your way to the beginning. Why? Your brain already knows what you have written. By reading from end to beginning, the pattern is broken and you will find more errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- **DO NOT RELY ON SPELLCHECK.** Remember “principle” and “principal” are both correct spellings. Which word did you intend to use? Other biggies “to” and “too,” “its” and “it’s.”
- **PLAGIARISM MEANS TAKING ANOTHER PERSON’S WORDS OR IDEAS AS YOUR OWN.** Be careful to always cite your source whether you quote directly or paraphrase. Remember, if it’s not common knowledge or your original idea, you must cite the source.

Critical Thinking Skills

Don't Believe Everything You See, Read, or Hear

Decide for yourself what to believe. Critical thinking is important in order to: enhance common sense, filter emotion, categorize experiences, select reference, understand the “experts”, sort fact from opinion, and learn to express yourself in a cogent and expressive manner. Critical thinkers are attractive socially, able to resist manipulation, able to overcome confusion, able to perceive connections between subjects and events, able to base judgments on evidence and facts, and able to realize that the “truth” is never simple. Grey or foggy areas always exist.

Library Tips

- Be sure the topic is acceptable to instructor and has sufficient available resource material.
- Do not wait until the first paper/project to scope out the campus library. Many libraries offer tours for freshmen.
- Learn how to use available databases and ask library staff for assistance if needed.

Writing the Paper

Prepare a written outline: Don't make the mistake of trying to keep everything in your head. Make your outline in the form of main headings or ideas with sub-headings fleshing out the flow of the paper. This will establish the paper's content and conclusion. Use the outline as a guide and stick to it. Write in your own natural style. Reread, rewrite, revise and edit until the paper says exactly what you want to say in the way you want to say it using correct punctuation and grammar. Use a spelling and grammar checker if using a word processor.

Adapted from: Keys to College Success; www.quickstudycharts.com