

Reading Difficult Material

Choose a moderate amount of material or a chapter to begin.

Preview the material getting a grasp of the topic and how the material is organized.

Scan the section for titles, headings, sub-headings, and topic sentences to get the general idea; pay attention to graphs, charts and diagrams.

If there is a summary at the end of the chapter, read it. Check the beginning and the end for leading questions and exercises.

Read first for what you do understand, and to determine difficulty.

Read actively—annotate the passage. Mark what you do not understand to review later.

As you read, practice the “look-away method.” Periodically look away from the text and ask yourself a question related to the text. Phrase the question positively. (For example: “What words *should* you look up when you cannot figure out meaning from text?”). Respond, or restate, in your own words. Make connections and associations, but don’t use this exercise to memorize—but rather to understand.

Look up words. Look up the words whose meanings are important to your understanding of the material, but you cannot figure out from the context.

Read to the end. Don’t get discouraged and stop reading. Ideas can become clearer the more you read. When you have finished reading, review to see what you have learned, and reread those ideas that are not clear.

Organize your notes by connecting ideas. You may choose to draw a concept map or complete a Sweat Page. Pay attention to relationships between ideas.

Do not confine yourself to words! Use representations, graphics, pictures, colors—even movement to visualize and connect ideas. Use whatever techniques work to help you understand the material.

At this point, if you do not understand your reading, do not panic! Set it aside and read it again later or the next day. If necessary, repeat this method. Waiting allows your brain to process the material, even while you sleep. This is referred to as distributed reading and spaced learning.

Re-read the section you have chosen with the framework (outline or concept map) you have constructed in mind. Separate out what you understand from what you do not understand.

If the reading is still a challenge, consult with your teacher, academic counselor, tutoring center or reading faculty.