

Basics

Reading is not just reading. There are different approaches to reading that we use for different reasons. This **Factsheet** looks at two reading skills, skim reading and close reading. Skim reading is reading to get the general idea of a text – this is, for example, how we usually read newspapers. Close reading is when we read a text to get a full understanding – we read newspapers in this way when we are very interested in the subject.

The academic context

In universities and colleges, students often need to skim read and close read. We may skim read an article or a website quickly to get a general understanding and see if it contains some of the information we need. If it does, we can go back to the text and close read it.

Key features

- Here are some tips for skim reading:
 - 1 Don't skim read without a pen and paper – you need to make notes.
 - 2 If there is an introduction, read that quickly, as it will give you some idea of what's in the text.
 - 3 Don't forget to look at any pictures or images, as they can also give you information quickly.
 - 4 At this stage, don't read the whole paragraph, as the first sentence or the last sentence will often be the topic sentence. The topic sentence will give you key points from the paragraph.
 - 5 As well as looking at the introduction, look at the conclusion. Again, this will hold key ideas.
- Close reading is a much slower and more complicated process, so allow yourself time and silence to do it. You may also want to divide the text into sections so you can have a break between them.
- You should always skim read before you do the close reading. As you skim read, if you think you are going to close read the text, write one question down for each paragraph, because that will help you read in detail.
- Write down the answers to your questions as you read.
- When you have finished, study your questions and the answers, and add any other notes you have taken while close reading. This will give you a stronger understanding of the text

Challenges / difficulties

- The challenge with skim reading is to ensure that you can find the topic sentences quickly, as they will contain the key information. Sometimes they can be difficult to find, but practice will help you.
- Close reading can feel very challenging, especially with a long text. Working with a colleague on the same article and discussing the meanings of each paragraph or section together can make it feel easier.

How can I develop this skill?

Practise skim reading and close reading in your everyday reading. See if you can apply the tips above to some of the following:

- an informative text, e.g. an in-depth news report
- a fiction text, e.g. a novel
- an argumentative piece of writing, e.g. an opinion piece in a newspaper

Learning outcome

Students will be able to demonstrate that they can apply skim reading and close reading techniques to a text.

Theory to practice

Look at the text below. It's about cross-cultural awareness. You are going to a lecture about this topic and have been asked to find an article that explains:

- what cross-cultural awareness is
- why it's important
- what the first stage of cross-cultural awareness is

Skim read the text quickly and decide if this article will help you. What do you think?

Cross-cultural awareness – an introduction

Cross-cultural awareness is a field of study that helps us to understand the differences and similarities between cultures in order to find ways to live and work together.

Cross-cultural awareness is important for three reasons. Firstly, for international business, as it's very important to have a basic understanding of the cultures that you are working with. Secondly, in education, since in many universities there are students from around the world and a lot of multicultural classes. In order to study well together and learn from and with each other, cross-cultural awareness is important. Thirdly, cross-cultural awareness and understanding helps all of us globally to be more tolerant and globally and avoid conflict.

The first stage of cross-cultural awareness is to know and understand your own culture – this is called cultural self-awareness. All of us look at other cultures from the position of our own culture, and once we understand ourselves better, cross-cultural awareness becomes much easier.

There are several ways of developing self-awareness, and the simplest one is simply to observe yourself. Think how you behave with other people, how you feel about things and what you do. Another useful way of increasing self-awareness is to ask other people what they think about your culture. Understanding what others think of you is a very interesting way to start understanding other people.

Now close read the article and underline the following parts of the text:

- a definition of cross-cultural awareness
- three reasons why it's important
- why self-awareness is so important
- two ways of developing self-awareness

Here is the same text underlined after close reading. Do you agree with how it has been done?

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Ways to get more practice

Take a moment three or four times a week during your studies to find a text and either just skim read it for the key points or skim read it and then close read it. Choose a subject you are really interested in. This will make it easier.