

Factsheet

Strategies for effective reading

Basics

Effective reading means using a combination of strategies to get the information you need as quickly as possible. As you have seen in other **Factsheets**, we read in different ways. For example, we might use speed-reading techniques to help us quickly evaluate a book or a text, while we might use a much slower, more careful approach when we want to examine the writer's choice of words. Effective reading means choosing and using the right strategy in each case.

The academic context

When you are a student, there are thousands of books and articles that might apply to your subject. It would be impossible to read them all, but you need to be able to select the most useful ones and then understand them as best you can.

Key features

The strategies include:

- knowing what you hope to get from the article or text
- using titles and other information to predict the content (see separate **Worksheet** on this)
- skimming a text or speed-reading it (see separate **Worksheet** on this)
- scanning a text for relevant information
- reading closely for detail

To read effectively, you also need to create good conditions, with adequate lighting, comfortable surroundings and no interruptions. Something that students often overlook is the time of day you choose to read. Some people are better in the mornings, while others do their best studying at night – only you know when you are at your best. Similarly, you are the best judge when it comes to whether music helps you focus on your reading or distracts you from it.

Challenges / difficulties

Effective reading can be hard to achieve because you need a little self-knowledge and you have to be honest with yourself. We often find excuses for not reading, but conditions are rarely perfect – we must be serious about it and keep to a regular routine. It is also very easy to get distracted. Sometimes it helps to set up a reward system – by telling yourself that you will do an hour's studying before you check your social media, for example.

How can I develop this skill?

The **Worksheet** will give you the opportunity to try out several strategies. Then, the best way to develop is with practice. The more you read, the easier it gets. One thing that many students find helpful is to time themselves. This way, you soon learn when you are at your most (and least) effective. If you find yourself reading without taking anything in, it is time for a rest. A lot of students spend hours doing not very effective reading, when a break, a short sleep or a change of environment for a few minutes would mean they could get the job done very quickly.

Learning outcome

Once you learn this skill, the benefits are enormous. Effective reading means you can study and still have time for a social life and any other obligations or responsibilities. Learning effective reading strategies puts an end to hours of sitting at a desk with little benefit. You will cover considerably more work in much less time.

Theory to practice

Memorization strategies

Train your brain and become a memory champion.

Highlighting, underlining and copying are three ways to help you memorize. They are, however, passive activities. There are also more active ways of remembering that engage your brain at a deeper level. Using new information when you speak or write, or doing word puzzles or games helps memorization. One study found that students remember information best when they know they will be asked to teach it to someone else. Another tip is to use the information soon after learning it.



1 Look at the title of the extract and the subheading. What do you expect the article to be about?

2 Read the extract very quickly (in about a minute) to confirm. Was your answer to Exercise 1 correct?

3 Read the extract and find:

- two active ways to help memorize things
- the findings of a study

4 Read the extract one more time and underline all the ways the extract suggests we can develop a better memory.

Ways to get more practice

The **Worksheet** will give you the opportunity to practise the different techniques. After that, you should try them out on your own, depending on your needs. Make your study time count. Try getting up early to study (many people are far more effective in the mornings). If you feel you are losing concentration, get up, walk around, have a rest or do something different, then come back feeling refreshed. Try timing yourself. Set targets, offering yourself rewards if necessary, such as *I will go out for the evening as soon as I've made notes on this chapter.*