Effectively Reading Difficult Texts

In an academic context, you're often required to read texts that are not easy to read. This guide will give you a few tips on approaching "Hard Readings" and getting the best out of them.

To be able to read difficult texts and get the best out of them there are things you should do before you read, while you read and after you read.

1. First: Pre-Reading – Identify the Type and Context of the Text
2. Second: Reading – Engage with the Text
3. Third: Post-Reading – Review, Recall and Make Connections

First: Pre-reading- Identify the Type and Context of the Text

Type of Text

Reading a fictional text is different from reading a textbook, and also different form reading a journal article. Identifying the type of the text you are about to read will give you an idea on how to approach it.

In case of fiction: you might want to start by reading the introduction, getting information about the author, the target audience, and when this work was published.

In case of a textbook: you'll benefit more by going through the table of contents, the chapter organization, and sample questions.

With journal articles, you might benefit from reading the abstract to know the main question(s) of the article and main conclusions or findings.

Context of the Text

In most cases, when the text is difficult, it's because it's unfamiliar to you, that's why the first thing to do is to familiarize yourself with the topic by understanding its context.

- Familiarize yourself with the topic (do a pre-reading to give yourself context)

Who wrote the text? when was it written? What was the purpose? How was it understood when it was first published? and how is it understood now?

A few resources that can help you get this 'contextual information' include:

- Wikipedia

- CliffsNotes version of the text

- The text itself (forward, introduction, conclusion)

- Encyclopedia

- Understand key terminology by consulting a dictionary

NOTE: "*We don't recommend Wikipedia and CliffsNotes for real research, we just recommend them for getting background information about the topic or "priming".*"

Context within the Course

It is important to know why you have been assigned this reading, and what expectations does your professor have from you. Figuring out what you're looking for in a text will help you identify which parts to focus on, which parts to skim through and thus will help you save time and effort.

Ask yourself:

- Why have I been assigned this text? What am I supposed to get out of this text?

- How will I use this reading in this course?

A good place to get this contextual information is from the course syllabus, or by simply asking your professor or TA.

Second: Reading: Engage with the Text "Effectively"

Actively engaging with the text goes beyond simply reading, highlighting and underlining parts of the book or article you're reading. It is taking your reading one step up to get the best out of the difficult text you're reading.

Do:

- Stop and ask questions about what you're reading

  - identify the author's line(s) of reasoning and evaluate this critically

  - evaluate the evidence for the author's argument

- question their apparent ideas and check for any hidden assumptions
- check whether the evidence cited in the paper supports the author's conclusions
- Closely pay attention as you read to find answers for your questions, and note these down.
- Re-read bits if you feel you need to
- Make your own notes about the text

Did you know, easier isn't necessarily better when it comes to learning?

The more effortful learning feels the better you're able to recall it in the future.

Third: Post-Reading Review, Recall and Make Connections

The post reading step is super important if you want to make best use of the information you just read. This step has to do with reviewing what you have learned, and connecting the knowledge acquired from this reading to prior knowledge and to the bigger picture "the course".

To review and recall the text:

- Go back to the questions you wrote down in your notes and try to answer them in your own words
- Discuss the article with a fellow-student or a TA
- Reflect on the text you read and note to yourself
    - how it relates to what you already know?
    - how it relates to the course?
    - how can you use the information in this reading in this course or beyond?

This is a very effective learning strategy that helps you learn more deeply, and retain the new information in your long-term memory. To learn more about consolidation watch this video

To learn more about Effective Reading – check out our self-paced online module [(Effective Reading and Note Taking)](), for more information about Academic Success Skills please enroll in our self-paced course Academic Success on the E-learning: Engineering, ICS, Energy Engineering, Arts & Design – Enroll [here]() BAEPS, MMC, law, Arts & Humanities – Enroll [here]() Dentistry, Pharmacy, and Nursing- Enroll [here](), or visit our [Academic Success Skills]() Page.

Related topics: ([Effective_Note_Taking]())- [Checklist for Activating Note Taking]()– [Checklist for Activating Reading]()

Additional Resources [Effective Reading BUE Guide]()

You can download this Study Guide [Effective Reading Difficult]()