

How can I Read more efficiently?

One of my daughter's co-workers in the sandwich shop started uni this year. It seems he turned up for work a little bit seedy after O-week, moaning "Did you know how much beer you have to drink at uni?"

A more common complaint, in my experience, is how much you have to read at uni! Most people feel that there's too much reading, and they aren't sure what to take notes on because it's all so new. How can you know what's important? Well, it's easier to find the main points if you know where to look! - and luckily, different kinds of texts have characteristic, fairly predictable structures. So, see if this helps:-

What kind of text are you reading? Get an overview.

* A general textbook is written to teach students the main ideas in a field, rather than arguing an individual point of view. Read the headings first, and any "teaching devices" like summaries or questions following the chapters.

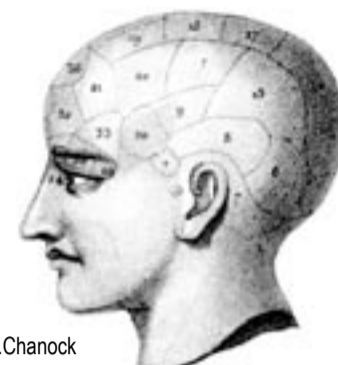
Also, note what questions your subject guide asks. Then you'll see the answers as you read, and make notes of those.

* A specialised book or article often argues (ie, demonstrates, with evidence) a particular idea (thesis) about the subject matter, which may or may not agree with others. (Often you are asked to compare readings because they don't agree; discuss the differences and which idea makes better sense, and why.) These arguments don't always begin with the author's main idea. They may begin with the context of what others have said, that this author is either going to take further or to raise doubts about. Usually his/her own idea comes next. You can check whether you've found it by looking at the conclusion, because it's usually restated there. Then read the rest.

- * A research article, in a scientific discipline, has a standard structure: Abstract (a brief summary of the whole article - READ THIS!); Introduction (stating the aim or problem of the study); Methods (what was done, with what materials, equipment, etc); Results (what the study found out); Discussion (what the results mean, whether they agree or disagree with previous studies, and any problems with them; Conclusions, and perhaps recommendations based on the results). If you read the introduction and then the discussion, you can go to the other sections knowing the purpose and outcome of the study. You may meet readings of this kind in disciplines like Linguistics, Archaeology, Psychology, and Sociology.
- * A report begins with a Summary, so that you can get an overview before plunging into the Introduction, Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations.

Skimming

Because of the way that arguments are typically put together, you can often skim an article quickly before you read it in depth. Read the first paragraph (or the first few, if it takes that long to present the context and introduce its thesis), and then skip to the conclusion, as above. Then read the first sentence of each paragraph. This may be enough to give you a preview of



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the whole argument. If not, try reading the first and last sentence of each paragraph. Writers in the British academic tradition, including Australians, usually put the point of each paragraph in the first sentence (the "topic" sentence); Americans often put it in the last sentence.

Once you appreciate how helpful it is when other writers organise their ideas this way, with clear topic sentences to start each paragraph, you'll see why tutors want you to do the same. It makes their reading of your work (and therefore their marking of it) very easy, so it's really in your interests to write good topic sentences.

Skimming like this only takes a few minutes, and can save you time and confusion. It can also save you making unnecessary notes as you read, because sometimes you find that the article has summaries, from time to time, of what it has said up to that point, and it's enough just to make notes of these!



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Models

I'm blonde. I'm slim. I have green eyes. And I don't like models.

It's not a personal thing - I have nothing against them personally, it's just that I think it's an utterly ridiculous job to aspire to. Can you imagine having children, bringing them up to love, respect and have dignity for themselves. You pay stupid amounts of money to educate them, have music lessons, perhaps horse riding lessons. You take them on holidays to places of historical and cultural significance. And then one day they come home from school and state that they want to wear clothes for a living. Thank god! For a minute you were worried they were going to take off their clothes for a living!

But do you get my point?

I think it's great that tall girls can make lots of money. They are, after all, silent victims of society. But to be fair, to both them, and everyone else, it's a job that's just a little bit past its use-by-date - much like spearing whales, using asbestos, and feeling sorry for Catholics. After all, mannequins were invented many years ago. It's a simple case of evaluation - like computers replacing certain human-held positions - models can now be replaced by painted bits of wood. I think it's a fair exchange.

Take Megan Gale for example. Beautiful girl, very successful, a great 'Aussie export' to Italy. Good for her. I saw her on Kerri-Anne's morning show the other month - she was promoting Australian Fashion Week. How lovely of her. But it was the fact that she was discussing fashion and modeling as if she had just signed a peace declaration between America and the Middle East that made me switch off. Why was she on TV?

Who was she to discuss the rules of fashion and style. She wears clothes - she doesn't design them. So why do we celebrate models, such as Gale, so much? We also export beef to Italy. Why not celebrate that?

Maybe it's the position of modelling that gets to me. Maybe it's the fact that so many models make their job so seriously that irritates me like a bad rash.

They talk of walking the right way, the endless torture of applying fake tan to their bodies, like, every second night! It could be the fact that suppressing one's diet is not good, or having to memorise that 'I've just had a stroke' expression on their face every-time they walk down the catwalk that gets my goat.

But I have good news! Models are like blue whales - an endangered species.

Have a look in any women's magazine, at the ads promoting cosmetics, perfume and so on. Ten years ago Cindy, Naomi and Elle would have been smiling at readers, getting us to buy whatever products they were flogging. Now, look at today's ads. Halle, Uma, Sarah Michelle and Jamie are enticing us to buy. Actors, not models! I suppose it makes more financial sense - not only can these women wear clothes and make-up well, but they can also talk! Wow! Double the talent!

In the end though, maybe it's just plain jealousy - from a plain Jane - on my behalf. I wish I could make as much money by wearing my clothes. Maybe I'm not as smart as models - I wear clothes for free everyday, and nice ones, I must add.

But at the end of the day, models are also like yogurt - they have a use by date. No one likes to see a wrinkled 26 year old in fashion magazines, so maybe models are justified in asking for six-figure sums to walk up a plank, and then back down again. Oh, and don't forget the little turn at the end - there have been many 'turn'-related ankle injuries.

So, forgive me models, for my cruel, jealous streak. I didn't mean it. I think you're super*.

* I lied once in this article. Can you guess where?

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