

Reading Strategies

Analyzing general reading strategies

We know intuitively that reading is good for us, though sometimes it can feel like a chore—especially when it’s required for school. The following video emphasizes the benefits that reading can bring, by literally changing the way our brain works. While we won’t necessarily learn how to do Kung Fu just by studying a book, reading about an activity apparently makes the pathway towards acquiring that new skill much easier!

Transcript: [Reading Can Change Your Brain.pdf](#) 

Reading for education is a bit of a different activity than reading for pleasure. Effective reading for educational purposes doesn’t consist of just looking at a text once and then putting it away. Instead, successful reading in education is a series of interrelated activities that involve interacting with a text several times, in differing ways. The rest of this section walks through those activities, and how they will help you become a stronger student.

What You Will Learn to Do

- analyze rhetorical context of a text (purpose, author, audience)
- analyze previewing as a reading strategy
- analyze active reading as a reading strategy
- analyze summarizing as a reading strategy
- analyze reviewing as a reading strategy

Video: Rhetorical Context

The following video demonstrates how external factors influence a piece of writing, even before the first word is written down.

The video focuses on the use of rhetoric from the viewpoint as a writer. As you watch, consider how the same elements hold true from the viewpoint as a reader.



[Link: The Rhetorical Situation \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

attention to these factors that shaped the document. Consider:

As a reader, pay

- What do I know about the **author**, just by reading this text? How does the author’s experience or education shape the reading?

- What do I know about the **goals** for this work, just by reading this text? How do these goals influence what actually appears in the text?
- What do I know about the **intended audience** for this work? Am I a member of that intended audience?

Reading Strategy: Previewing

What It Is

Previewing is a strategy that readers use to recall prior knowledge and set a purpose for reading. It calls for readers to skim a text before reading, looking for various features and information that will help as they return to read it in detail later.

Why Use It

According to research, previewing a text can improve comprehension (Graves, Cooke, & LaBerge, 1983, cited in Paris et al., 1991).

Previewing a text helps readers prepare for what they are about to read and set a purpose for reading.

The **genre** determines the reader's methods for previewing:

- Readers preview nonfiction to find out what they know about the subject and what they want to find out. It also helps them understand how an author has organized information.
- Readers preview biography to determine something about the person in the biography, the time period, and some possible places and events in the life of the person.
- Readers preview fiction to determine characters, setting, and plot. They also preview to make predictions about story's problems and solutions.

When To Use It

Previewing is a strategy readers use before and during reading.

How To Use It

When readers preview a text before they read, they first ask themselves whether the text is fiction or nonfiction.

- If the text is fiction or biography, readers look at the title, chapter headings, introductory notes, and illustrations for a better understanding of the content and possible settings or events.
- If the text is nonfiction, readers look at text features and illustrations (and their captions) to determine subject matter and to recall prior knowledge, to decide what they know about the subject. Previewing also helps readers figure out what they don't know and what they want to find out.

How to Preview

Consider previewing a text as similar to watching a movie preview.

Think of previewing a text as similar to creating a movie trailer. A successful preview for either a movie or a reading experience will capture what the overall work is going to be about, generally what expectations the audience can have of the experience to come, how the piece is structured, and what kinds of patterns will emerge.

Previewing engages your prior experience, and asks you to think about what you already know about this subject matter, or this author, or this publication. Then anticipate what new information might be ahead of you when you return to read this text more closely.

Active Reading

A Two-Way Street: Reading as Conversation

Think of every text your instructor assigns as one half of a conversation between you and the writer. Good conversations achieve a balance between listening and responding. This give-and-take process drives human discourse. While one participant speaks, the other listens. But while the listener appears passive on the surface, he's most likely already preparing his response. He may evaluate what his partner says, testing it for how closely it matches his own ideas, accepting or rejecting part or all of the statement. When he does respond, he expresses his reaction, or asks a question about something he doesn't yet understand. Active reading mirrors this process closely. An active reader "listens" to the text, evaluating what the writer says, checking to see if it matches or differs from his current understanding of the issue or idea. He asks pertinent questions if something remains unclear, looking for answers in subsequent sections of the text. His final goal, of course, is to make a statement of his own, in the form of the essay he will eventually produce.

Retracing Your Steps: Read Every Text (at least) Twice

In fact, reading is in many ways better than conversation, because, like writing, it is recursive: you can revisit a text over and over, whereas the spoken word, unless recorded, disappears into the past, often along with part—or all—of the message the speaker was attempting to convey. When you read, you can move forward and backward in time, making sure you've captured every nuance. You should read the text more than once, first for a general understanding, and then for a detailed analysis; your first read-through may raise questions only a second reading can reveal the answers to.

Marking the Trail: Annotation

An active reader views the text as a living document, always incomplete. She reads with pen in hand, ready to write her observations, her questions, and her tentative answers in the margins. We call this annotation, the act of writing notes to oneself in the blank spaces of the page. It's not the same as underlining or highlighting, neither of which promotes active reading. A simple

line underneath a passage contains no information; it merely indicates—vaguely—that you found a certain passage more important than the surrounding text. Annotation, on the other hand, is a record of your active responses to the text during the act of reading. A simple phrase summarizing a paragraph, a pointed question, or an emphatic expression of approval or disbelief all indicate spirited engagement with the text, which is the cornerstone of active reading.

Pace Yourself: Know Your Limitations and Eliminate Distractions

You can't hike the Appalachian Trail in a day. Similarly, you can't expect to sustain active reading longer than your mind and body will allow. Active reading requires energy and attention as well as devotion. Short rest periods between readings allow you to maintain focus and deliberate on what you have learned. If you remain diligent in your reading practice, you'll find that you can read actively for longer periods of time. But don't push yourself past the point at which you stop paying attention. If your mind begins to wander, take ten minutes away from the text to relax. Ideally, you should read gradually, scheduling an hour or two every day for reading, rather than leaving your assignments until the last minute. You can't hope to gain full or even partial comprehension of a text with a deadline looming overhead.

When and where you read can be as important as how long you read. Plan your reading sessions for hours when your mental energy is at its height—usually during daylight hours. Likewise, you should select an optimal location, preferably one free of distractions. Loud music, the flickering of a TV screen, and the din of conversation tend to divert your attention from the task at hand. Even a momentary distraction, like a quick phone call or a friend asking a question, can interrupt the conversation you are having with your assigned text.

Summarizing

Are you familiar with the phrase, *the best way to learn something is to teach it to someone else*?

Writing a summary of a source is a very similar process to teaching someone the content—but in this case, the student you're teaching is yourself.

Summarizing—condensing someone else's ideas and putting it into your own shortened form—allows you to be sure that you've accurately captured the main idea of the text you're reading.

How to Write Summary Statements

Use these processes to help you write summary statements:

- Underline important information and write key words in margin.
- Record ideas using a two-column note-taking system. Record questions you have about the text concepts in the left column and answers you find in the reading in the right column.
- Identify how concepts relate to what you already know.
- Add examples and detail.

For retaining key ideas as you read, write a summary statement at the end of each paragraph or section. For capturing the major ideas of the entire work, write a summary paragraph (or more) that describes the entire text.

These summary statements will be very useful to draw from in the final step of the reading process, **reviewing**.

For longer, overall summary projects that capture an entire reading, consider these guidelines for writing a summary:

- **A summary should contain the main thesis or standpoint of the text, restated in your own words.** (To do this, first find the thesis statement in the original text.)
- **A summary is written in your own words.** It contains few or no quotes.
- **A summary is always shorter than the original text, often about 1/3 as long as the original.** It is the ultimate fat-free writing. An article or paper may be summarized in a few sentences or a couple of paragraphs. A book may be summarized in an article or a short paper. A very large book may be summarized in a smaller book.
- **A summary should contain all the major points of the original text**, and should ignore most of the fine details, examples, illustrations or explanations.
- **The backbone of any summary is formed by crucial details** (key names, dates, events, words and numbers). A summary must never rely on vague generalities.
- If you quote anything from the original text, even an unusual word or a catchy phrase, **you need to put whatever you quote in quotation marks (" ").**
- **A summary must contain only the ideas of the original text.** Do not insert any of your own opinions, interpretations, deductions or comments into a summary.

Reviewing

Reviewing is the final stage in the academic reading process. All the other steps you've taken while reading—previewing, active reading, and summarizing—put the content into your head. Reviewing helps seal it in place, and makes sure it stays accessible when you need the information later.

You can use a variety of strategies to review:

- quiz yourself using your questions
- review a chapter map you made while previewing or actively reading
- expand the map
- create vocabulary cards
- recall the information in writing or out loud

As you review, monitor your learning.

- What do you know well?
- What still needs reinforcement?

