

Effective Reading

You probably think that when you sit down, open a book, and read, you will absorb it all. In actuality, you can read every word on the page and not understand a bit of it. In order to become an effective reader, you have to be an active reader. That means doing more than just looking at the words on the page; it means becoming involved with the material and thinking while you read. These are the basic steps for becoming an effective reader:

1. Know Where You're Headed -- And Why

Keeping the "big picture" in mind as you read will help keep you on track. Try to keep in mind not only *what* you are reading, but *why*. Think about some of these questions:

- What do you think your professor is hoping you will gain by reading this?
- What might you personally gain from reading this?
- How does the chapter or text fit in with the overall subject matter of the course?
- How does the text fit in with the current course topics (i.e., the lectures for that week)?
- Does the chapter build on previous material? How?
- Does the chapter prepare you for upcoming topics? How?
- Is anything in the chapter familiar to you? What? Where and when did you first learn it? What did you already learn? What in the chapter is new to you?

2. Make A Rough Outline

Just as you do when taking notes during a lecture, you should make a rough outline of all reading assignments. This will fulfill two important purposes:

- Taking notes will keep you focused on the assignment and minimize the tendency to let your mind wander.
- These outlines will help you remember the material.

As you read, watch for headings and subheadings and, as they come up, write them down.

3. Watch for Key Terms and Take Notes with Brief Definitions

Use your own words to define the key terms as briefly as possible.

4. Note General Themes

When you are finished with a chapter, take a few minutes to jot down its general themes. Consider these questions:

- What seemed to be the author's main concerns in this chapter?
- What ideas, topics, or points were mentioned more than once?
- Was there any kind of introduction or conclusion? If so, what points did the author make here?
- Did you get a sense of the author's opinion or stance on the material he or she was addressing? What was it?

5. Write a Response

If you want to learn something from what you read, it is crucial that you think about it after you've finished reading. An excellent way to keep you thinking is to write a reading response. Here are some questions you might address in your response:

- What is your emotional reaction to what you've read? Do you like what you read? Why or why not? How did reading the text make you feel? How do you think the writer wants you to feel?
- What points do you think are most important to the writer? Did the writer successfully convey these to you?
- What parts, if any, did you have trouble understanding? Why? What made it confusing?
- What questions about the text do you still have? Are there additional questions about the subject matter that were not addressed in the text?
- How does this text connect with other things you've learned? Does it tie into things you've studied in other courses? Does the reading remind you of anything else?