OFFICE OF ACADEMIC RESOURCES

READING STRATEGIES

The typical college curriculum entails a great deal of reading, often much more than you were assigned in high school. The reading can also be significantly more challenging. Although reading may seem like second nature by the time you get to Haverford, there are probably ways to improve your reading skills to become more effective and efficient. Several key strategies are outlined in this handout. To learn even more about personalized reading strategies you can attend one of our workshops or schedule an appointment to meet individually with an OAR staff member specialist to develop a individualized approach.

Pre-reading Strategies

- Define your purpose for reading before you even begin
- Ask yourself pre-reading questions. For example: What is the topic and what do you already know about it? Why has the professor assigned this reading at this point in the semester? What questions do you expect to be answered in each section?
- List assumptions or prior knowledge you have about the material/themes
- Begin to construct a "mind map" – a type of brainstorming in which you place the title/subject in the middle of the page and create images and connections to related subtopics that help you develop a map of the material
- Research the subject matter, author, and time period in which the text was written
- Skim the reading for any key terms that you are unfamiliar with; define them in a list and keep that list near you while reading to maintain the flow and rhythm of your reading
- Keep the KWL Method in mind: What do I know? What do I want to know? What did I Learn?

Active Reading Strategies

- Bracket the main idea or thesis of the reading and find a way to identify it easily for future reference.
- Put down your highlighter and make marginal notes or comments instead. Every time you feel the urge to highlight, write instead. Vary how and what you write. You can summarize, critique, reword, etc. Consider yourself to be in an active dialogue/debate with the author.
- Be intentional about how and what you write in the margins and/or flag. Match a color pen or flag to a purpose. Is this evidence for an upcoming paper? A key point to be emphasized in class discussion? An idea that you are unsure of and what to discuss during office hours? A topic that is likely to be on an exam?
- Write questions in the margins and then answer the questions in a separate notebook, as part of your notes, or on a separate piece of paper.
- Make separate outlines, flow charts, mind maps or diagrams to help you make connections and to understand ideas visually. This is particularly effective for visual learners and serves as a tool for teaching the concepts to others as well.
- Read each paragraph carefully and then determine "what it says" and "what it does". Answer what it says in only one sentence.

Post-reading Strategies

- Write a summary of an essay or chapter in your own words. Do this in less than a page. Capture the main ideas and perhaps one or two key examples.
- Redefine key terms in your own words without returning to the text.

Cited and adapted from materials from the Office of Learning Resources (NYUAD), the McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning (Princeton University), and the Dartmouth College Learning Center.

- Write your own exam based on the reading.
- Develop beneficial questions and conversations for a group discussion.
- Note how long and how many pages you read; your page per hour speed will allow you to plan your reading and studying time better.
- Take time to critically reflect on whether you agree or disagree with what you read and why, as well as what was not addressed in the text that should have been.
- Review and organize the key points you highlighted for the various purposes – evidence, salient points, questions, etc.
- Teach what you have learned to someone else. Research has shown that teaching is one of the most effective ways to learn. You will quickly discover what you do and don't understand, and will begin to transfer the information from short-term to long-term memory.

"Studies have shown that students skilled in reading comprehension tend to interact with course material actively through paraphrasing, summarizing, and relating the material to personal experience, while students less skilled in reading comprehension tend to underline or reread passively without the use of specific strategies." (Dowhower, 1999; Duffy et al, 1987; Long and Long, 1987)

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