

Reading Strategies: A Guide for Graduate Students

Reading Practices

Critical reading is an ongoing practice. It's not something you learn to do once and master. It's something to cultivate.

There are many ways to read! Consider how the strategies in this guide could help you reflect upon what you do. How might you enhance your reading practices?

Strategy 1: Identify what you're reading

Get a sense of what to expect by identifying:

- **Genre** - genres of scholarship (e.g. empirical studies, conceptual papers, theoretical texts) are like genres of fiction in that they have conventions you can anticipate.
- **Organization** - subheadings, chapters, indexes, search features help you navigate.
- **Length** - how much time will it take you to read the text? Is only part relevant to your topic or research question(s)?

Strategy 2: Adjust depth

Whether you skim, dive, or go deep depends on the text and your reading goals.

- **Skim** - get a general sense of the text through an abstract, introduction, conclusion.
- **Dive** - identify a thesis, key ideas, and conclusions.
- **Go deep** - how strong is the evidence presented, what are some nuances of the argument?

Strategy 3: Read laterally

Look beyond the main body of text by reading laterally.

That means opening tabs to find out about the publisher, researchers, associations, etc.

Check out [Skim, Dive, Surface: Teaching Digital Reading](#) (2021) if you're interested in this topic.

Strategy 4: Adjust speed

Speed reading is not the goal!

Reading scholarship means engaging in conversation. Consider how things ebb and flow as you take in someone else's words and respond.

Pause after a paragraph to check-in: did you absorb what you just read?

Re-read and seek clarification when something is unclear.

Strategy 5: Assess claims

Determine what claims the authors make and how those claims are supported.

- What is the thesis or research question?
- What methods do the authors use to address their question?
- What are the main findings?

Critical appraisal tools help researchers evaluate the quality of studies (qualitative, quantitative, cohort, etc.).

- [Critical Appraisal Tools \(JBI\)](#)
- [Critical Appraisal Skills Programme \(CASP\) Checklists](#)

Strategy 6: Organize & prioritize

Organizing a lot of different readings for a large project like a dissertation or thesis is much easier with citation management software.

Keeping readings in one place will help you prioritize what to read when. It will also help you manage your reading time.

Visit [managing citations](#) to find out more.

Strategy 7: Take notes & annotate

Citation management software like [Zotero](#) and [Mendeley](#) have PDF readers and note editors.

Note-taking will help you retain and revisit ideas.

Strategy 8: Make connections

Scholarship is conversation - a single study includes many communicators engaging with one another's ideas. You can make connections between those conversations by:

- Adapting a synthesis matrix like [this one](#).
- Following [citation trails](#).

Strategy 9: Self-monitor

Literacy scholars study reading as **(a)** an embodied act and **(b)** human-technology interaction.

As readers, we should consider how our physical environments, emotions, and tools impact our practices.

- If possible, adjust your physical space to make it more comfortable.
- Check in with yourself and take breaks as needed.
- [Attend workshops](#) about digital tools like citation management software.

Strategy 10: Build metacognitive awareness

The Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) is a self-report instrument designed to assess students' awareness of reading strategies.

A full inventory with scoring and interpretation information is available in "[Revising the MARSI](#)" (pp. 244-246).

You can try taking it yourself, or just check out the 15 strategies.

Strategies are useful, but is something missing here?

From Kathleen Fitzpatrick's [Generous Thinking](#) (2019):

[R]eading together is at the heart of how the university operates, how we both teach and learn. But that teaching and learning requires that we scholars not only share the materials of our fields and our interpretations of them with those around us, but that we more generously open ourselves to honor the ways that others read as well (p. 90).

What could it mean to read for connection through respectful and responsible conversation together?

Conclusion

Engaging in reading practices that fit your goals, circumstances, and settings is a critical communicative act.

Researchers share their work in different ways.

Our digital environment creates many possibilities for communicating scholarship.

Podcasts are only getting more popular! The strategies in this guide apply to listening practices as well.

Questions?

Contact your [subject librarian](#).