

Active Reading for Graduate School

APSU Writing Center Handout

Graduate-level reading can feel overwhelming, especially when faced with long, complex texts.

Active reading helps you focus on what is most important so you can understand key ideas, save time, and apply what you read to your own work.

Active Reading

Active reading is the process of reading with a clear purpose. It involves identifying the **goal** of a text, determining its **relevance** to your research, and focusing on the most **important sections**.

Evaluate the Article or Book

Articles

When approaching an article, begin by reading the **abstract**. The abstract provides a summary of the text and introduces the main argument, key findings, and overall significance.

Books

When working with a book, use the following tools to guide your reading:

- **Introduction:** Summarizes the author's argument, explains the methodology, and outlines each chapter.
- **Book reviews:** Available through academic databases and provide scholarly evaluations of the text.
- **Table of contents:** Helps you understand the structure and identify which chapters are most relevant.

- **Index:** Located at the back of the book and allows you to quickly find key terms and topics.

Consider the Texts

As you evaluate a source, consider the following:

- **Credibility:** Refers to the author's expertise and the reputation of the journal or publisher.
- **Circulation:** Indicates how often the text has been cited by other scholars, which can reflect its influence in the field. This information can usually be found through article metrics or citation counts.
- **Age:** Refers to how current the source is and whether it is still relevant to your research.

Sharpen your Writing Goals

Questions to answer:

- What's most important about this article to you?
- Can you focus your reading on certain sections?
- How do you want to use this article as you begin writing?

Your answers to these questions should guide both your reading and your notetaking. It can be helpful to write one or two guiding questions at the top of your notes to maintain focus. With this approach, your notes may begin to resemble a first draft of how you plan to incorporate the source into your own writing.

Targeted Reading

Targeted reading involves selecting only certain sections of a text to read closely. By reading strategically and focusing on the most relevant material, you can gain a strong understanding of the text while using your time more efficiently.

To practice targeted reading:

- **Skim** through the section headings to get a sense of the article's scope and organization.
- Read the article's **introduction** carefully. A good introduction will include a summary of the argument and a roadmap of the sections.
- Quickly read the **first sentence or two** of each paragraph.
- Highlight or note the most **important topic sentences**.
- Take enough time to understand the **overall argument**, especially if you plan to cite or quote the article. Academic writers often present perspectives they may not personally agree with.

Making Connections Between Works

Ask questions to connect sources and identify key works:

- Who is this author citing?
- Do they agree or disagree with other sources?
- Are there any gaps in the currently available research?
- Are multiple scholars citing the same work? This may indicate an important or controversial source.
- How are approaches to the topic changing over time?

- Can you categorize work based on argument, methodology, or theory?

Thinking About Applications

Consider how the work relates to your own research:

- How is this research related to your own?
- Could it inform you of your research questions or goals?
- Is there a methodology you can use?
- Is there a theory that aligns with your approach?

Reference

Purdue Online Writing Lab. (n.d.). *Getting started with graduate writing*. Purdue University.

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/graduate_writing/introduction_to_writing/getting_started_wit
h.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/graduate_writing/introduction_to_writing/getting_started_wit
h.html)