

How to improve your speed and effectiveness in reading academic literature

Reading and improving one's reading skills takes a long time, and is never completely finished. For academic reading, the most important thing is to develop different reading practices – to build **flexibility**. Textbooks and non-fiction are not novels, poetry nor religious texts. You are looking for information and arguments, not savouring the language nor the story, nor digesting holy scripture. **You do not have to read every word from page 1 until the end of the text! However, sometimes it can also be very important to take time to read and understand difficult passages: this is slow.** Here are some (edited) tips from ChatGPT.

ChatGPT 4o (4 December 2024): Improving reading speed and effectiveness involves a combination of techniques tailored to enhance comprehension, retention, and efficiency. Here are the main strategies:

1. Pre-Reading Techniques

- **Set Clear Goals:** Determine what you need to extract from the text.
- **Survey the Material (SQ3R Method):**
 - Skim headings, subheadings, introductions, summaries, and visuals.
 - **Question:** Pose questions based on the headings to guide your reading.
- **Preview Abstracts and Keywords:** In academic articles, these provide a quick overview of the central themes.

2. Skimming and Scanning

- **Skimming:** Read only the first and last sentences of paragraphs to identify the main idea.
- **Scanning:** Look for specific information, such as dates, names, or key terms, without reading everything.

3. Active Reading

- **Annotate:** Highlight key points, underline arguments, and jot down notes in the margins.
- **Summarise:** After finishing a section, write a brief summary in your own words.
- **Engage with the Text:** Formulate questions or arguments about what you are reading to deepen understanding.

4. Focused Reading Techniques

- **Chunking:** Group words into meaningful clusters rather than reading word by word.
- **Minimise Subvocalization:** Reduce the habit of silently pronouncing words as you read.
- **Pacing:** Use your finger, a pen, or a ruler to guide your eyes and maintain speed.

5. Manage Cognitive Load

- **Read in Short Bursts:** Break the reading into manageable chunks to maintain focus.
- **Space Repetition:** Revisit key sections at intervals to enhance retention.
- **Take Notes Mindfully:** Use structured formats like Cornell Notes or mind maps.

6. Optimise Reading Environment

- **Eliminate Distractions:** Choose a quiet, focused space.
- **Adjust the Material:** Use digital tools like adjustable font sizes or text-to-speech for variety.

7. Time Management

- **Prioritise Reading:** Focus on the most relevant sections first.
- **Set a Time Limit:** Use tools like a timer to challenge yourself without sacrificing comprehension.

8. Use Technology

- **Digital Annotation Tools:** Highlight and comment on PDFs or e-books.
- **Speed Reading Apps:** Tools like Spreeder or BeeLine Reader can train you to read faster.
- **Text-to-Speech Tools:** Listen to material to reinforce understanding.

For tips on “**How to Read a Textbook**”, see this great video by Socratica:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0vfLGHoREU>