Unit (1) Understanding Academic Reading

“God helps those who help themselves”

Active reading and thinking skills

1. What do you understand from the short saying above?

2. Choose the best ending for each paragraph.

   (Mikulecky & Jeffries (1997) *More Reading Power*. Addison-Wesley Publishing)

   2.1 Chocolate is one of the most popular sweets in the world. It is eaten as candy, cakes, cookies, and puddings. In some places, however, it is also eaten in a non-sweet form. The Mexicans, for example, make a chicken dish with a spicy chocolate sauce. This sauce does not include

   a. any chocolate.
   b. any vitamins.
   c. any sweetener.
   d. any candy.

   2.2 In the past, if you need to eat Japanese food, you had to go to Japan. Now, you can find Japanese restaurants all around the world, from New York to Rome or Sydney. In the same way, Italian food used to be found in Italy. Now, Italian restaurants can be found everywhere, from Moscow to Tokyo or Sao Paulo. People everywhere are learning to enjoy the foods of other countries. Someday, it may be possible to

   a. eat Italian food in Tokyo.
   b. eat only traditional food in each country.
   c. eat every kind of food in every country.
   d. eat only Japanese food.

   2.3 The “Potato Famine” was a terrible period in the Irish History. In the early 19th century, many Irish people were very poor. They had little to eat except potatoes. Then, in the 1830s, a disease killed most of the potatoes plants in Ireland. With no potatoes to eat, millions of Irish people

   a. got sick.
   b. ate meat instead.
   c. were much happier.
   d. died of hunger.
2.4 Fog is a major cause of accidents on highways in some areas. Every year many thousands of people lose their lives because fog can dangerously reduce visibility. The drivers cannot see very far ahead so they
   a. do not have time to avoid accidents.
   b. go faster to avoid accidents.
   c. Have more time to read the signs.
   d. do not have time to have accidents.

2.5 When Christopher Columbus sailed west from Spain in 1492 he wanted to reach Asia. He did not know there was another continent in between Europe and Asia. In fact, when he died he still believed that the land he had found was
   a. Asia.
   b. America.
   c. Spain.
   d. another continent.

2.6 Most flowering plants bloom in the spring or summer. But there are some plants that also have flowers in the winter. One of these is the peony. Certain kinds of peonies can produce beautiful red or pink flowers even
   a. on the warmest days of the year.
   b. when other flowers are blooming.
   c. on the coldest days of the year.
   d. when it has no leaves.

3. What do the above examples tell you about reading?

4. Read Handouts (1-3) available at the end of the book and list the main points/ skills/ strategies you learned from each. You will be asked to discuss your summary in class.

   2.1 Handout (1) Developing Academic Reading: Active reading, different ways of reading (skimming, scanning & critical reading) and SQ3R.
   2.2 Handout (2) Six Reading Myths
   2.3 Handout (3) Harvard Report: what is it about?
5. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about reading? Why?

a) “Reading is important because it develops the mind. The mind is a muscle. It needs exercise. Understanding the written word is one way the mind grows in its ability.” (Learn to Read)

b) Skilled readers are thinking readers. They know how to monitor their reading for comprehension and how to adjust if comprehension is lost. They prepare for reading tasks before starting to read, construct meaning as they read, and reflect on their reading when they finish. (The Northwest Florida State College. 2010: 20).

c) As a skilled reader engages a text, (s)he also engages a thinking process that leads to the development of meaning. The thinking process involves interplay of processes such as the reader drawing on prior knowledge while also making inferences about the text and creating elaborations (Griffith & Ruan, 2005, p.6 quoted in The Northwest Florida State College. 2010: 20).

d) “If you want to read well in English, you must think in English as you read. If you think in another language [Arabic] and translate from the English, you will always have difficulty with comprehension. Understanding the words and grammar is not enough. You need to be able to follow the ideas in English.” (Mikulecky, Beatrice & Jeffries, Linda2004:180)

e) The prior knowledge you bring to the text you intend to read will positively affect how you understand what you read. One of the strategies to activate your prior knowledge to understand a text faster is examining the title of the text you are about to read.

f) ‘Think of reading as a “treasure hunt”: an active search rather than an attempt to soak up and absorb everything you come across.’(Peter Levin Write Great Essays! (2004. p2)

g) KWL is an effective reading strategy which means

What do I Know? What do I Want to learn? What did I Learn?
Fast Reading strategies: Why read faster?

There are two important reasons for learning to read faster:

- You can read more in less time
- You can improve your comprehension.

When you read slowly, you read one word at a time. The words seem separated like the words below. Is it easier or harder to understand?

What really happens when we read? Some people think we read one word at a time. They think read a word, understand it and then move on to the next word.

It is harder to understand because the separate words become separate pieces of information that you must remember. By the time you get to the end of a sentence you may have forgotten the beginning!

When you read faster, you understand better because you focus on ideas by reading groups of words that are connected.

6. **Check your reading habits**: Certain bad habits may be slowing you down.

a. Do you Skip over unknown words?
b. Do you skip over many other words that are not important for the general meaning?
c. Do you try to pronounce each word as you read? Pronunciation is not necessary for comprehension. In fact, if you try to say the words, even silently, you will probably understand less.

d. Do you usually move your lips while you read silently? If you do, you will never be able to read faster than 200 words per minute, the fastest speed at which English can be spoken.
e. Do you follow the words in the text with your finger or a pencil while you read? This is another habit that can slow you down. It also limits the way you read because you cannot skip around. Pointing at the words forces your eyes to follow the lines of text too closely. Your eyes should follow your thoughts, not your finger!
f. Do you translate into your native language as you read in English? Do you often write translations of words in the English text? This will slow down your reading speed and it will interfere with your ability to think in English.

7. For more fast reading practice,
   a) do the exercises in Handout(4): Fast Reading Strategies at the end of your textbook.
   b) use these Online speed reading websites
      - Use Eyercise (http://www.eyercize.com/) to help you become an accomplished speed reader.
      - Spreeder.com is a free online speed reading software designed to improve your reading speed and comprehension. http://www.spreeder.com/

Academic Reading skills
(Based on Northumbria University Library Leaflet, 2012)

8. Read Handouts (5: pivotal words and 6: Vary your reading Rate) and use your general knowledge to decide which of the following academic reading skills do you agree with? Why?

   a) You have to read everything to understand a text.
   b) You have to read every word in a text.
   c) No words are as helpful while reading as the prepositions and conjunctions that guide your mind along the pathways of the author's ideas
   d) Good readers are flexible in their reading attack
   e) An effective reader should read everything at the same speed in the same way.
   f) Good readers should increase speed when you come across unnecessary examples and illustrations.
   g) Reading a text once is always enough.
   h) Understanding the main ideas, theories, key themes and arguments included in a text is sufficient in academic reading.
   i) Academic reading is more than just recognising words on a page. It requires concentration on a deeper level, and you will need to understand the meaning of what the author is trying to say and think about/reflect on the main theories, concepts and opinions.
Modes/Types of Academic Reading

Skimming & scanning; extensive & intensive reading

9. Read Handout (7): Different Reading Techniques and When to Use Them and try to understand the differences between these four types of reading: Skimming & scanning; extensive & intensive reading.

As a university student, you will be assigned a variety of reading texts. Sometimes it is important to read slowly and carefully. Other times, you are just trying to find specific information. Skimming and scanning are skills that will help you with both of these types of reading.

a) When we **skim** through a text, we **run your eyes over it very quickly** - reading the title, the first few sentences of each paragraph, the conclusion to get the main idea and an impression of how long and difficult the text is.

b) When we **scan** or search a text, we look for specific information which we know, or suspect, is there. This specific information could be key word, name, date, location, number, fact, opinion, idea, factor, cause, etc.

c) **Extensive reading**: involves reading long texts for general understanding, with the intention of enjoying the texts (for pleasure) like reading literature or interesting articles n magazines, or journals.

d) **Intensive reading**: involves reading shorter texts in detail with specific learning aims and tasks. Intensive reading activities include reading a text for specific information to answer specific questions like true or false statements or filling gaps in a summary, or putting events or ideas in into the correct order, and so on.

Depending on the purpose of their reading, readers choose between either of the four modes of reading: skimming, scanning, intensive reading or extensive reading. Sometimes you may use more than one mode.
10. Using the descriptions about the different types of reading above to match the reading tasks below. (The University of Sheffield, *Reading Skills.*
[http://www.learningtolearn.group.shef.ac.uk/read/read_difkind_task.html](http://www.learningtolearn.group.shef.ac.uk/read/read_difkind_task.html)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading task</th>
<th>Skimming</th>
<th>Scanning</th>
<th>Intensive reading</th>
<th>Extensive reading</th>
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<td>a. Reading a novel to pass time on a plane</td>
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<td>c. An announcement for a final exam</td>
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<td>d. Reading a text for reading comprehension exam</td>
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<td>e. Telephone directory</td>
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<td>f. An academic article conclusion</td>
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<td>g. A poem</td>
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<td>h. Train timetable</td>
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<td>i. Whether a text humorous or serious</td>
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<td>j. You are searching for possible answers to exam questions in your textbook.</td>
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<td>k. You've downloaded an article from a database but you are not sure whether it is relevant or not</td>
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Handouts

Handout (1): Developing Academic Reading

‘Think of reading as a “treasure hunt”: an active search rather than an attempt to soak up and absorb everything you come across.’

Peter Levin Write Great Essays! (2004, p2)

At University you will be expected to do a good deal of reading. You will have extensive reading lists which can seem quite intimidating. This is why it is important to develop an effective reading strategy. A key element of such a strategy is to develop an active reading approach.

1. Active reading

When reading for academic purposes it is useful to ask yourself the following questions:

- Why am I reading this?
- Do I need to read it all?
- Where should I start?
- Which parts will be most useful?
- How can this text help me?

These questions should help you to start to engage with the material from the outset and become a more focused reader.

2. Different ways of reading

The way we read depends on the material we are reading and our purpose for reading it. Some of the different approaches to reading include:

2.1 Skimming – reading to form a general impression of the text. You do not try to read every word or in too much depth or detail. You can skim the introduction and conclusion to a book, or the opening and closing paragraph to a chapter or article. You can quickly skim through the content page, index or chapter sub-headings. The main purpose when skimming is to get the gist.

2.2 Scanning – looking for a particular piece of information. When you scan you ignore all the other information and focus on finding what you want. We scan when using a telephone directory. When we scan for information we usually know what we are looking for.
2.3 **Critical reading** – close and detailed reading of a text. When you read critically you need to continually analyse, question and evaluate what you are reading. Some useful questions include asking yourself:

- What is the main argument?
- What evidence does the author use to support and develop this argument?
- Is the evidence valid? (Is it up to date/relevant/biased?)
- Is the author’s argument similar or different to others you have read?
- How does the author’s argument develop this particular area of study?
- Do you agree with the author? (Why? Why not?)
- How can you use this information? (E.G. in an essay/report/presentation)

3. **SQ3R**

A useful reading strategy to use is known as SQ3R. This stands for **S**urvey, **Q**uestion, **R**ead, **R**ecall, **R**eview.

3.1 **Survey** – Quickly skim through the text. This should give you a general idea of what the text is about and help you to decide whether it is of any use to you.

3.2 **Question** – Can this text help me? Does it give me any useful information that I can use? Which part of the assignment can it help me with? Asking questions will help you to stay focused on your subject.

If after the first two steps you feel the text is of no use to you move on to another text. If the text is useful to you continue using SQ3R.

3.3 **Read** – Make a more careful and detailed reading of the text. Still try to remain focused on your reason for reading this text. Read through the text and make notes of any key/significant points. Use the **critical reading** questions listed above.

3.4 **Recall** – Put the text and your notes to one side and try to recall the information you have read. Make a note of any points you are still uncertain about.

3.5 **Review** – Re-read the text to check your understanding and seek clarification of the points you were uncertain about.

**SQ3R** may seem to make reading a time consuming process. However, with practice this will improve. The most important point about a reading strategy like SQ3R is that it will help you to become a more active reader. It allows you to engage with a text in a way that is meaningful and beneficial to you.
MYTH 1: I HAVE TO READ EVERY WORD

Many of the words used in writing grammatically correct sentences actually convey no meaning. If, in reading, you exert as much effort in conceptualizing these meaningless words as you do important ones, you limit not only your reading speed but your comprehension as well.

MYTH 2: READING ONCE IS ENOUGH

Skim once as rapidly as possible to determine the main idea and to identify those parts that need careful reading. Reread more carefully to plug the gaps in your knowledge.

Many college students felt that something must be wrong with their brain power if they must read a textbook chapter more than once. To be sure, there are students for whom one exposure to an idea in a basic course is enough, but they either have read extensively or have an excellent background or a high degree of interest in the subject.

For most students in most subjects, reading once is not enough. However, this is not to imply that an unthinking Pavlovian-like rereading is necessary to understand and retain materials. Many students automatically regress or reread doggedly with a self-punishing attitude. ("I didn't get a thing out of that paragraph the first time, so if I punish myself by rereading it maybe I will this time.") This is the hardest way to do it.

Good reading is selective reading. It involves selecting those sections that are relevant to your purpose in reading. Rather than automatically rereading, take a few seconds to quiz yourself on the material you have just read and then review those sections that are still unclear or confusing to you.

The most effective way of spending each study hour is to devote as little time as possible to reading and as much time as possible to testing yourself, reviewing, organizing, and relating the concepts and facts, mastering the technical terms, formulas, etc., and thinking of applications of the concepts—in short, spend your time learning ideas, not painfully processing words visually.

MYTH 3: IT IS SINFUL TO SKIP PASSAGES IN READING

Many college students feel that it is somehow sinful to skip passages in reading and to read rapidly. We are not sure just how this attitude develops, but some authorities have suggested that it stems from the days when the Bible was the main book read, savored, and reread. Indeed, the educated person was one who could quote long passages from these books from memory.

Today proliferation of books and printed matter brought about by the information explosion creates a reading problem for everyone. Furthermore, much of this printed material offers considerably less than Shakespeare or the Bible in meaning or style. You must, of course, make daily decisions as to what is worth spending your time on, what can be glanced at or put aside for future perusal, and what can be relegated to the wastebasket.
The idea that you cannot skip but have to read every page is old-fashioned. Children, however, are still taught to feel guilty if they find a novel dull and out it down before finishing it. I once had a student who felt she could not have books in her home unless she had read every one of them from cover to cover. Studies show that this is the reason many people drop Book-of-the-Month Club subscriptions; they begin to collect books, cannot keep up with their reading, and develop guilty feelings about owning books they have not had time to read.

The idea that some books are used merely for reference purposes and are nice to have around in case you need them seems to be ignored in our schools. Sir Francis Bacon once said that some books are to be nibbled and tasted, some are to be swallowed whole, and a few need to be thoroughly chewed and digested no matter how trivial the content. No wonder many people dislike reading.

**MYTH 4: MACHINES ARE NECESSARY TO IMPROVE MY READING SPEED**

Nonsense! The best and most effective way to increase your reading rate is to consciously force yourself to read faster. Machines are useful as motivators, but only because they show you that you can read faster without losing understanding. Remember that they are inflexible, unthinking devices that churn away at the same rate regardless of whether the sentence is trivial or vital, simple or difficult. They are limited too, for if you are practicing skimming, you are looking for main ideas so that you can read more carefully. Since these may not be located in a definite pattern (e.g. one per line) nor be equally spaced so that the machine can conveniently time them, machines may actually slow you down and retard the speed with which you locate the ideas that you need for understanding. If you find yourself in need of a pusher, use a 3x5 card as a pacer, or use your hand, or your finger. However, there is one caution you should observe if you try this. Be sure that your hand or finger or card is used to push, not merely to follow your eyes.

**MYTH 5: IF I SKIM OR READ TOO RAPIDLY MY COMPREHENSION WILL DROP**

Many people refuse to push themselves faster in reading for fear that they will lose comprehension. However, research shows that there is little relationship between rate and comprehension. Some students read rapidly and comprehend well, others read slowly and comprehend poorly. Whether you have good comprehension depends on whether you can extract and retain the important ideas from your reading, not on how fast you read. If you can do this, you can also increase your speed. If you "clutch up" when trying to read fast or skim and worry about your comprehension, it will drop because your mind is occupied with your fears and you are not paying attention to the ideas that you are reading.

If you concentrate on your purpose for reading -- e.g. locating main ideas and details, and forcing yourself to stick to the task of finding them quickly -- both your speed and comprehension could increase. Your concern should be not with how fast you can get through a chapter, but with how quickly you can locate the facts and ideas that you need.

**MYTH 6: THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT MY EYES THAT KEEPS ME FROM READING FAST**

This belief is nonsense too, assuming that you have good vision or wear glasses that correct your eye problems. Of course, if you cannot focus your eyes at the reading distance, you will have trouble learning to skim and scan. Furthermore, if you have developed the habit of focusing your eyes too
narrowly and looking at word parts, it will be harder for you to learn to sweep down a page of type rapidly.

Usually it is your brain, not your eyes, that slows you down in reading. Your eyes are capable of taking in more words than your brain is used to processing. If you sound out words as you read, you will probably read very slowly and have difficulty in skimming and scanning until you break this habit.

**Steps to Follow in Skimming for the Main Ideas**

1. First, read the title of the chapter or selection carefully. Determine what clues it gives you as to what the selection is about. Watch for key words like "causes," "results," "effects," etc., and do not overlook signal words such as those suggesting controversy (e.g. "versus," "pros and cons"), which indicate that the author is planning to present both sides of an argument.

2. Look carefully at the headings and other organizational clues. These tip you off to the main points that the author wants you to learn. You may be accustomed to overlooking boldface headings and titles which are the obvious clues to the most important ideas. If you concentrate on the details and ignore the main ideas, you will have much more difficulty retaining the information you read.

Remember that authors of college textbooks want you to recognize the important concepts. They use:

   a. Major headings and subheadings to convey major points.
   b. Italicized words and phrases so that crucial new terms and definitions will stand out.
   c. Lists of points set off by numbers or paragraphs that begin with the phrases such as "The three most important factors . . . " etc.
   d. Redundancy or repetition. By stating and restating the facts and ideas, the author ensures that you will be exposed in different ways to the concepts she feels are the most crucial for you to understand. She hopes that on at least one of these exposures you will absorb the idea. Therefore, it is vital that you recognize when an important concept is being restated in slightly different words and when you have completely mastered the idea.

Martha Maxwell- ©Academic Skills Center, Dartmouth College 2001
Handout (3) Harvard Report

As an experiment, Dr. Perry (psychologist), Director of the Harvard Reading-Study Center gave 1500 first year students a thirty-page chapter from a history book to read, with the explanation that in about twenty minutes they would be stopped and asked to identify the important details and to write an essay on what they had read.

The class scored well on a multiple-choice test on detail, but only fifteen students of 1500 were able to write a short statement on what the chapter was all about in terms of its basic theme. Only fifteen of 1500 top first year college students had thought of reading the paragraph marked "Summary", or of skimming down the descriptive flags in the margin.

This demonstration of "obedient purposelessness" is evidence of "an enormous amount of wasted effort" in the study skills of first year students. Some regard it almost as cheating to look ahead or skip around. To most students, the way they study expresses "their relationship to the pressures and conventional rituals of safe passage to the next grade".

Students must be jarred out of this approach. The exercise of judgment in reading requires self-confidence, even courage, on the part of the student who must decide for himself what to read or skip. Dr. Perry suggested that students ask themselves what it is they want to get out of a reading assignment, then look around for those points. Instructors can help them see the major forms in which expository material is cast. Students should also "talk to themselves" while reading, asking "is this the point I'm looking for?"

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