Academic reading
At University, you are required to evidence that your ideas, views, and opinions are valid through the reading you have undertaken. You also need to be able to evaluate the texts you use to evidence your arguments. Therefore, your ability to search for academically acceptable texts and read effectively is linked to the success you achieve.

How to find the texts you need
The focus of your reading will be on the subjects you are studying, and you will probably never read a complete academic book during your entire course of study. You need to ensure that you learn to search the library and the internet thoroughly. Start by reading the subject guides created by your librarian as these will help you to understand how the library is organised and will point you in the direction of subject specific websites. These guides are accessed through the library webpage. You can also attend a session on searching which will help you to find texts. These are run by the library and aim to help you to think about the words you are using to search for information and to refine your search strategy. By the end of your first year you should have developed your ability to search and evaluate the texts you have found.

What tutors expect
You need to engage critically with text and you will be expected to:
- Understand the content and variety of texts
- Reflect upon what writers have said
- Evaluate what you have read from different sources
- Develop your own ideas
- Use reading to develop your thinking

How to read critically
You need to learn to make judgements about the texts you read and their usefulness to you. Therefore, you need to adopt an active role by questioning the text. This will help you to stay focussed on your subject and enable you to find the information you require quickly.

For example:
- Is this an eminent person in my subject area?
- Why has the author written this book/undertaken this research?
- What is the main argument being presented?
- What evidence does the author use to support and develop this argument?
- Is the evidence presented valid? (That is: 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 topic?
- Do you agree with the author? (Why? / Why not?)
- How can I use this information?

The more widely you read the greater the debate you will be able to include in your work. However, you must ensure the texts you are using will be acceptable to your tutor.
The SQ3R method of reading

SQ3R stands for: Survey, Question, Read, Recall and Review.

This method can help you when preparing for exams as it combines memory development and skill acquisition at the same time.

**Survey** – A quick skim of the book or journal to give you a general idea of what the text is about. Look at chapter titles, sub-headings, pictures, diagrams, charts, graphs, introductory paragraphs of chapters and conclusions.

**Question** – Asking questions will help you to stay focused on your subject. What does this text tell me about X? What evidence does it provide for this view? How does this fit with my earlier findings? Does this support my views or not?

If after these two steps you feel that the text is of no use to you move on to another text. If you feel that it is useful, continue with the next three steps.

**Read** – Read the text in detail to answer the question you have set. Try to remain focused on your reason for reading the text. Pick out keywords and signpost words such as ‘therefore’, ‘nevertheless’, ‘furthermore’ and ‘alternatively’. Reduce your reading speed for difficult passages. Reread any passages that are unclear to you. Make notes on key points. Do not try to read too much in one go.

**Recall** – Recall the information you have read by either speaking it aloud or by writing it in your own words. Note any points you feel uncertain about. The suggested recall period is every 20 minutes.

**Review** – Check what you have recalled with the actual text to ensure that you are accurate. This method engages you in processing the text and not just reading on autopilot, which does little to aid your retention of the material.

**Skimming and Scanning**

To read efficiently however, you will need to develop your ability to skim and scan as this will enable you to locate relevant information quickly.

To skim a text you should assessing:

- titles and subtitles
- the beginning and end paragraphs of chapters
- the beginning and end sentences of paragraphs
- pictures and diagrams which summarise what the writer is saying

When scanning you usually look for:

- particular words or phrases which you expect to find in the text
- key words, which may be in italics or bold type
- specific information which you have found from the contents or index pages but cannot be located by a single word or phrase
- the structure or organisation of the text as this can make it easier to identify main ideas. For example, scientific texts are often organised as follows: Problem, hypothesis, experiment, results, discussion and conclusions.

Reading is a skill that is requires development at university as you need to evidence all your thoughts through your research (reading) on a topic.
Speed reading techniques

It is useful to understand how you read. Do you read each word as an individual unit or do you read a cluster of words in a single fixation (look)? A reader who reads each word separately is reading slowly and not very efficiently. As the brain is absorbing information slowly and separately this can hinder understanding. A reader who is more efficient has fewer fixations and reads a cluster of words together. The brain is able to make sense of the information more quickly and this aids understanding. You will probably have already developed some fast reading skills to some extent, but exercises practiced regularly can increase your reading speed. Two techniques are ‘eye gymnastics’ and ‘finger tracing’.

Eye gymnastics. When you train yourself to read clusters of words with fewer fixations on the text. You focus your eyes on the central cluster and this forces you to develop your peripheral vision.

Finger tracing. This involves reading a line of text following your finger from left to right in a single movement. This focuses you on the line you are reading and stops you from skipping forwards or re-reading what you have already read. It helps you to make sense of the text and increases your eye speed as you move your finger faster.

Be aware of things that can slow your reading down such as: Distractions such as noise, clutter etc; Poor eyesight; Poor lighting; Being cold; Over tiredness

Dyslexia

If you are having difficulty with your reading, for example, if you find text moves about on a page then you may have dyslexia. Please contact the Student Enabling Centre for support.