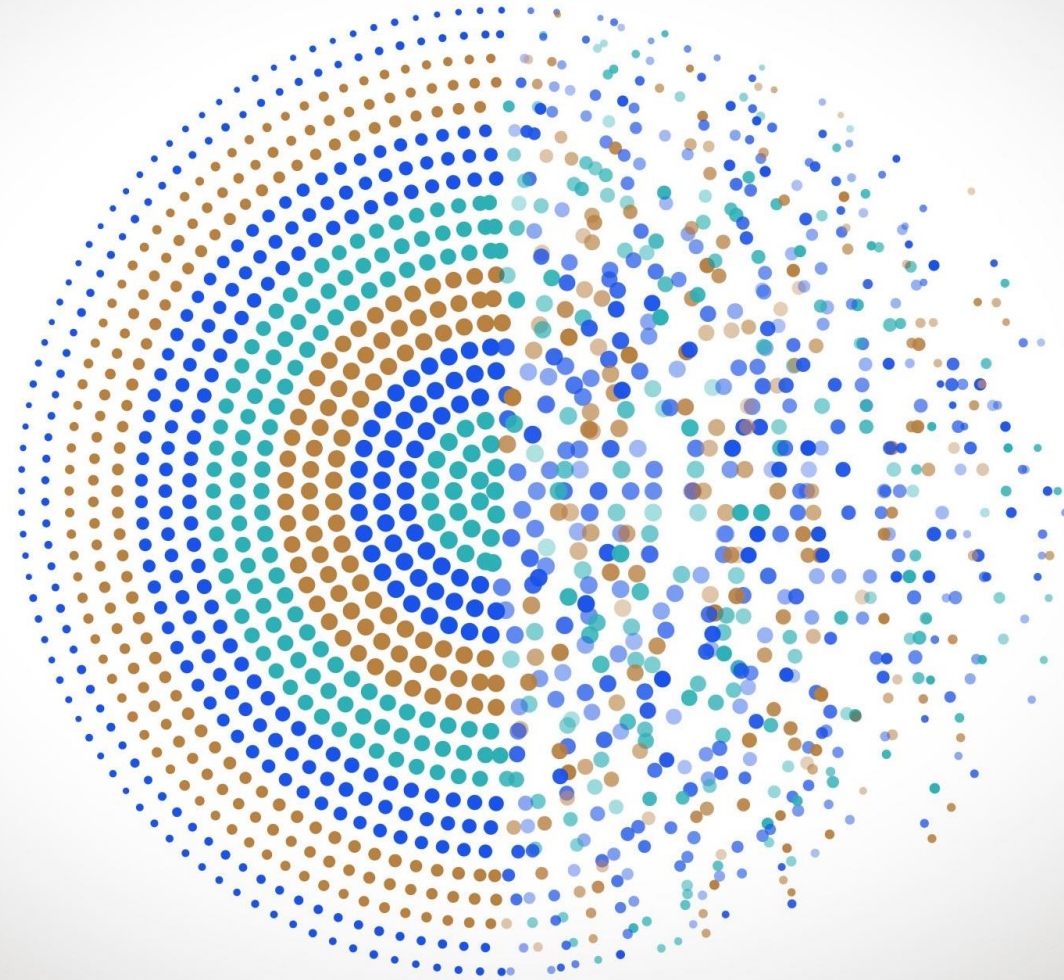

Week 4: Reading, Writing and Identifying Key Information

ECPS3003: INTRODUCING
UNIVERSITY LIFE



Reading and writing for a specific purpose

Last week, in *Academic and Digital Skills*, you looked at researching and evaluating various sources of evidence. Today's session involves using that information for a specific purpose.

What types of assessments will you come across during your time at university?

Reading is one of the most important skills required for success at university. Unlike school-level reading, university reading involves large amounts of complex information, academic language, research evidence, and critical thinking.

Many students quickly discover that simply reading every word is not enough. Effective reading requires strategy, concentration, organisation, and active engagement with the material.

This lecture explores practical techniques that aim to help you to read more efficiently, understand information more deeply, and improve academic performance.

Some questions:

What is the difference between passive and active reading?

Why is critical reading important at university?

Why is note-taking important during reading?



Understanding university reading

University reading differs from casual reading or reading for entertainment.

At university, students read to:

Understand theories and concepts

Analyse arguments

Gather evidence

Prepare for assignments and exams

Develop critical thinking skills

Academic reading is active rather than passive. Students must interact with the text instead of simply moving their eyes across the page.

Challenges you might face:

Many students struggle with university reading because:

There is too much material

Academic language can be difficult

Reading takes longer than expected

Concentration is difficult

Students try to read everything in detail

Understanding these challenges is the first step toward improving reading habits.



Preparing to read:

Effective reading begins before opening the book or article.

A. Set a Purpose

Before reading, ask:

- Why am I reading this?
- What information do I need?
- Is this for background knowledge, an assignment, or exam preparation?

Reading with a clear purpose improves focus and efficiency.



Preparing to read:

B. Preview the Text

Skim the material before reading in detail.

Look at:

- Titles and headings
- Introductions and conclusions
- Subheadings
- Diagrams and charts
- Bold or highlighted terms

Previewing creates a mental map of the content and improves understanding.

Active Reading:

Active reading means engaging with the material while reading.

A. Ask Questions

- Turn headings into questions.

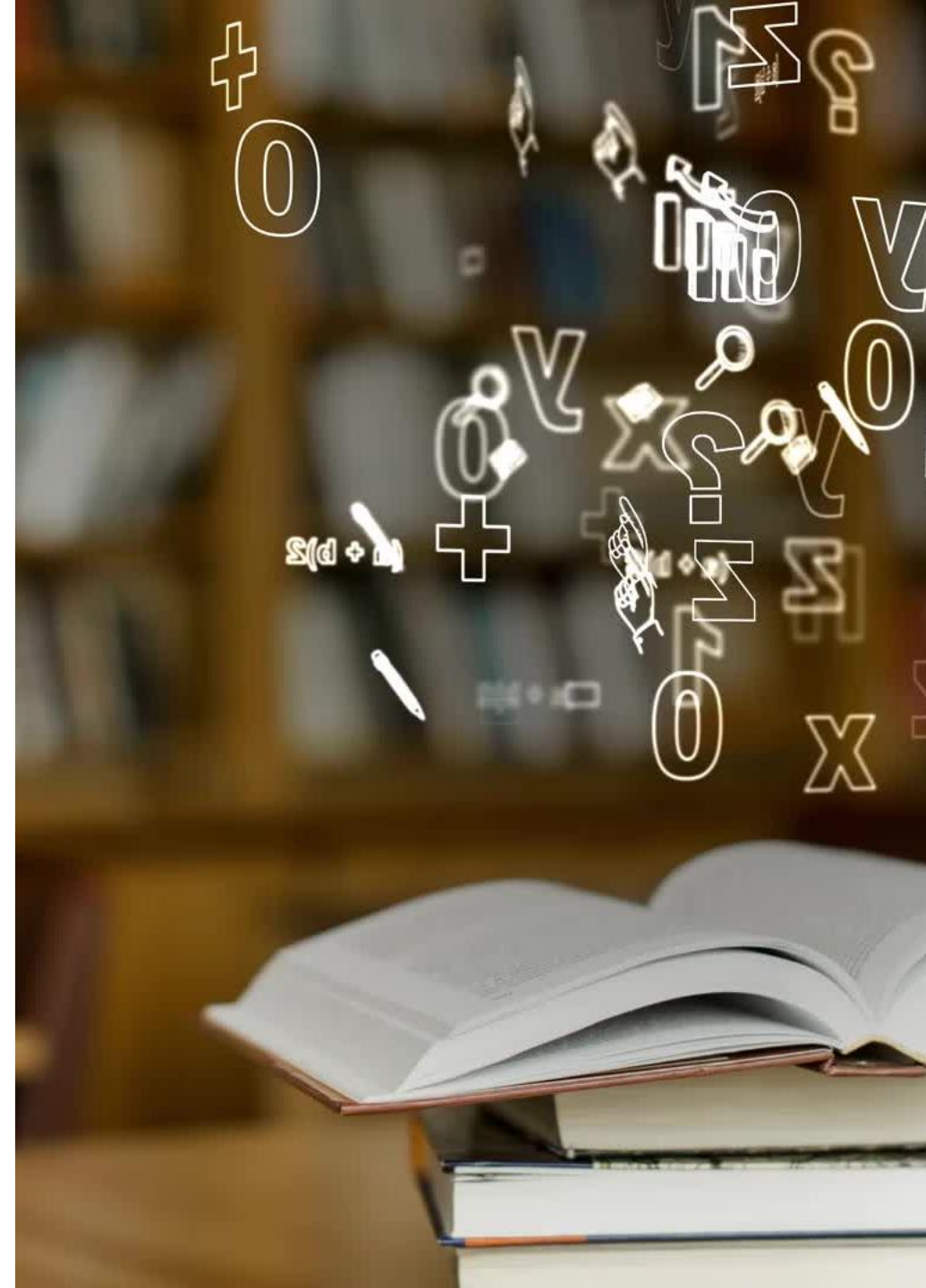
Example:

- Heading:
"Causes of Blind Obedience"

Questions:

- What are the main causes?
- Which causes are most significant?
- What evidence supports these claims?

Questions encourage deeper thinking and improve concentration.



Active Reading:

Active reading means engaging with the material while reading.

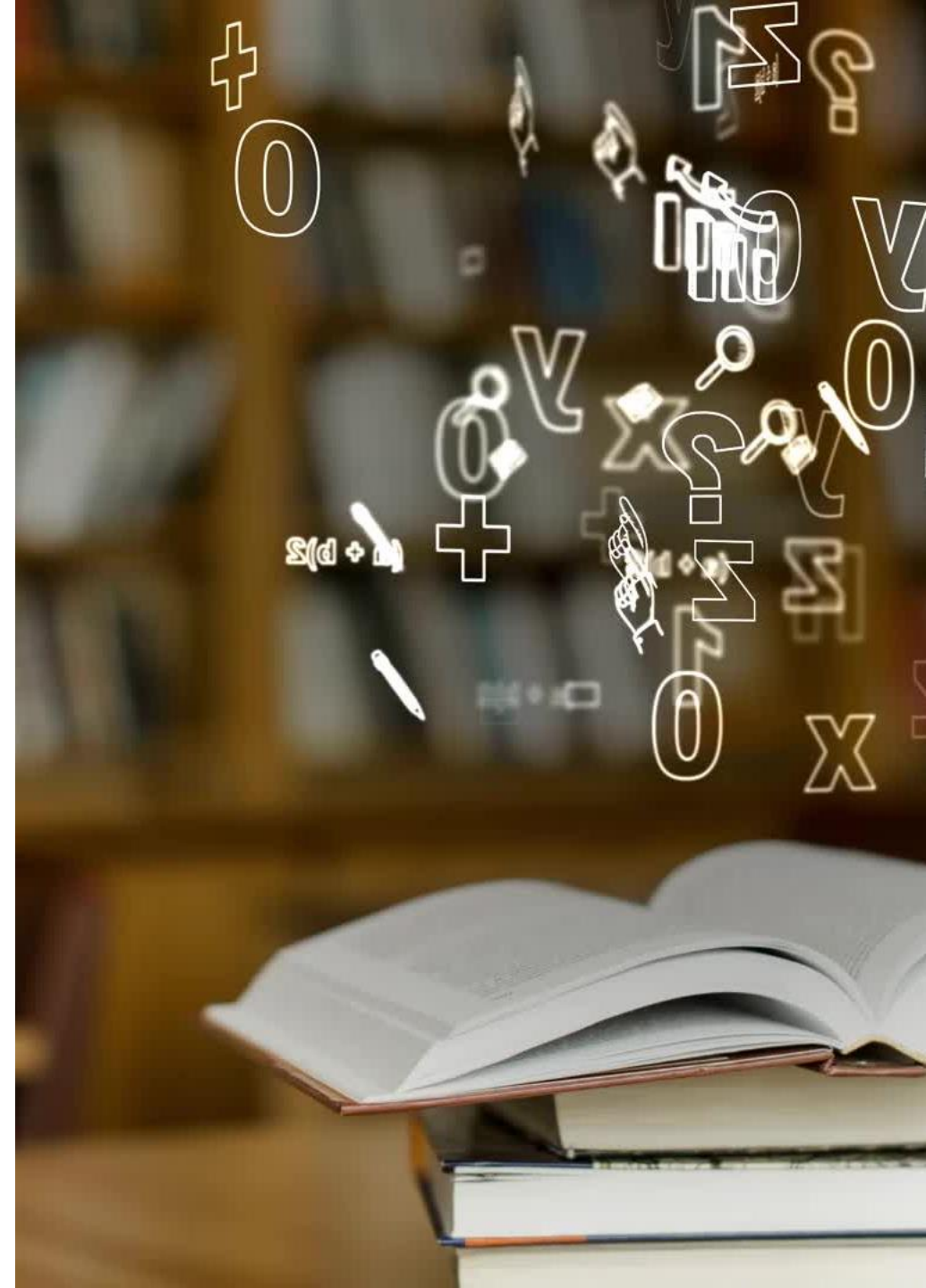
B. Highlight Carefully

Highlighting can be useful, but many students highlight too much.

Effective Highlighting:

- Highlight key arguments and evidence
- Use highlighting sparingly
- Focus on important concepts rather than entire paragraphs

If everything is highlighted, nothing stands out.



Active Reading:

Active reading means engaging with the material while reading.

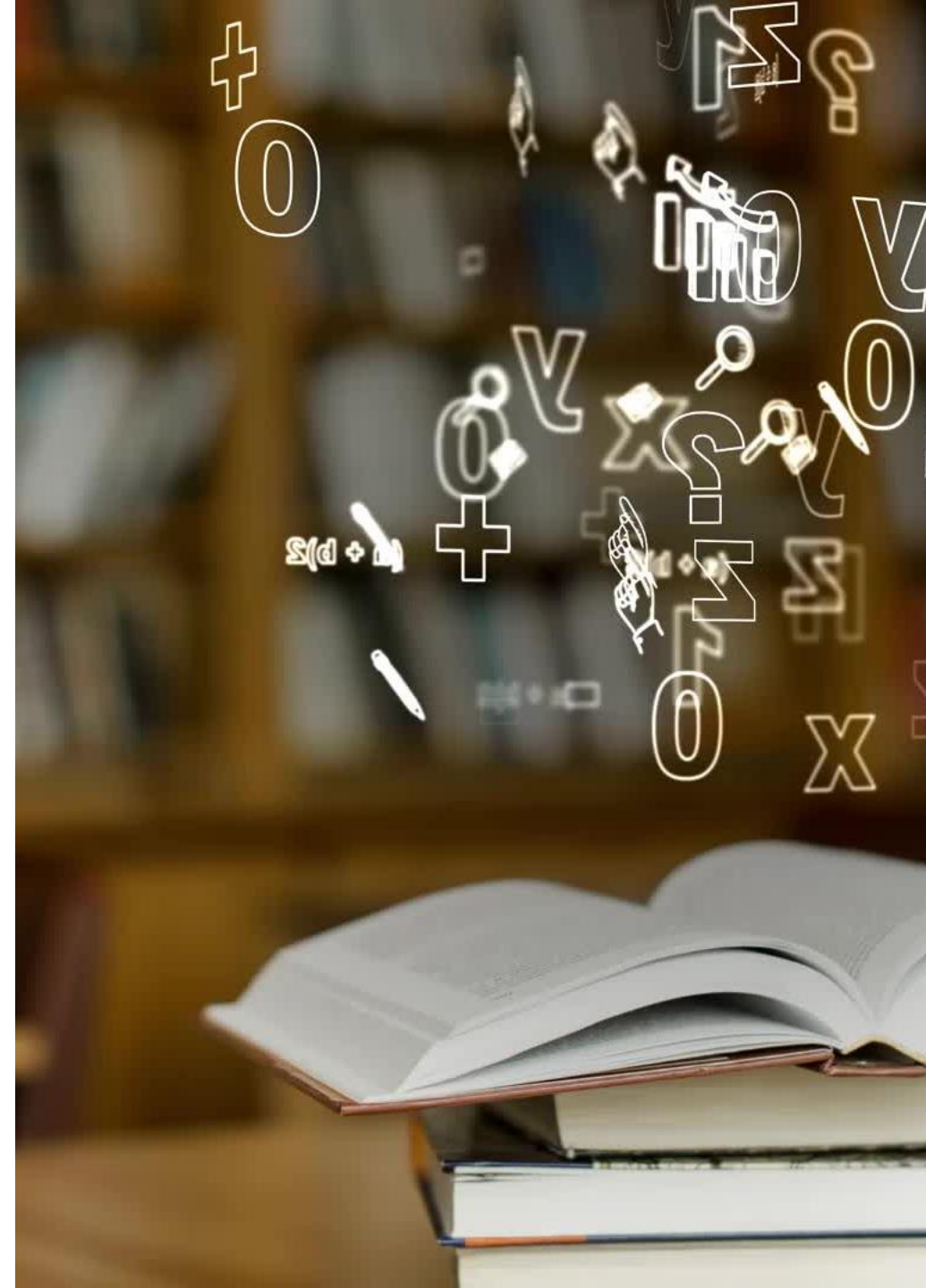
C. Take Notes

Writing notes improves understanding and memory.

Useful Note-Taking Methods:

- Bullet points
- Mind maps
- Cornell notes (we will be exploring this later)
- Summaries in your own words

Avoid copying large sections directly from the text.



Active Reading:

Active reading means engaging with the material while reading.

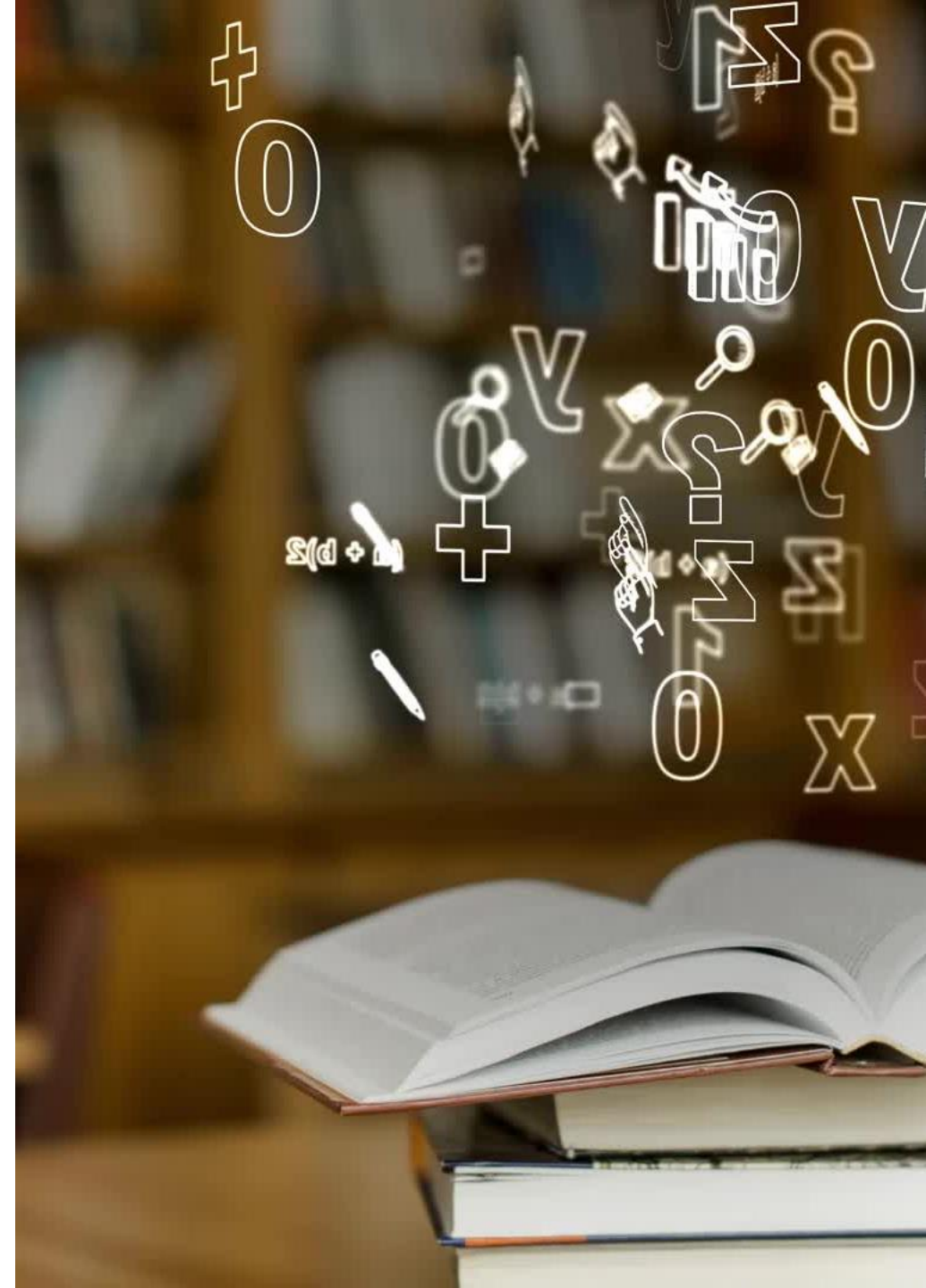
D. Summarise Information

After reading a section, pause and summarise the main ideas.

Ask yourself:

- What was the key argument?
- What evidence was presented?
- Can I explain this simply?

Summarising checks comprehension and strengthens memory.





Reading critically:

University students must learn not only to understand information but also to evaluate it critically.

Critical Reading Involves:

- Identifying the author's argument
- Examining evidence
- Detecting bias
- Comparing viewpoints
- Questioning assumptions

Questions for Critical Reading:

- Is the argument convincing?
- What evidence supports it?
- Are there weaknesses or limitations?
- Does another source disagree?

Critical reading develops independent thinking and stronger academic writing.



Managing large amounts of reading:

University courses often assign more reading than students can realistically study word-for-word.

A. Prioritise Reading

- Not all readings are equally important.

Focus on:

- Core textbooks
- Essential journal articles
- Recommended readings linked directly to assignments or exams

There are several ways in which you can adjust your reading techniques for different purposes.

Different techniques/speeds

SKIMMING AND SCANNING

Skimming – for general understanding.

Useful for:

- Previewing chapters
- Identifying key ideas

Scanning – for specific information.

Useful for:

- Finding dates, definitions, or statistics

DETAILED READING

Reading carefully for deep understanding.

Useful for:

- Complex theories
- Exam preparation
- Assignment research

Good students adjust their reading style depending on the purpose.

Improving concentration:

Concentration is essential for effective reading.

Tips to Improve Focus:

Remove Distractions

Silence notifications

Study away from noise

Avoid multitasking

Read in Short Sessions

Many students concentrate better in focused sessions of 25–50 minutes.

Take Breaks

Short breaks help maintain mental energy.

Stay Physically Comfortable

Good lighting, posture, hydration, and sleep improve concentration.

Academic language:

Academic texts often contain difficult vocabulary and complex sentence structures.

Strategies for Difficult Texts:

Break long sentences into smaller parts

Look up unfamiliar words

Read difficult sections more than once

Use context clues to understand meaning

Understanding improves with practice and regular exposure to academic materials.

Reading and Memory:



Reading alone is not enough for long-term learning.



To Improve Memory:



Review notes regularly



Teach concepts to someone else



Test yourself with questions



Connect new ideas to existing knowledge



Active recall and repetition are more effective than repeatedly rereading the same pages.



Good reading habits and avoiding mistakes:

- Read regularly instead of cramming
- Set daily or weekly reading goals
- Study at similar times each day
- Keep organised notes

Strong routines reduce stress and improve academic confidence.

Common Reading Mistakes:

- Reading passively without thinking
- Trying to memorise everything
- Leaving readings until the last minute
- Failing to take notes
- Reading without a clear purpose

Conclusions:



Effective reading is one of the foundations of university success. Academic reading requires more than simply recognising words on a page; it requires focus, analysis, questioning, and reflection.

Students who read actively and strategically are better able to:

- Understand complex ideas
- Participate in discussions
- Write stronger assignments
- Perform well in exams

Reading effectively is a skill that develops with practice. Over time, students become faster, more confident, and more independent learners.

Your task for today:

- You are provided with a journal article (below) to practice skimming and scanning to identify key arguments and/or statistics
- You will then be required to create a summary which is no longer than 400 words.
- [Are female and male brains fundamentally different? | BPS](#)

