

2 Reading to Write

'I had to train myself to focus my attention. I became very visual and learned how to create mental images in order to comprehend what I read'.

(Tom Cruise: actor with dyslexia)

At university, you will undertake large amounts of reading, often in a very short space of time. This can be a daunting prospect (even for students without dyslexia). Discussion forums, student blogs and feedback to tutors often highlight academic reading as a major challenge, especially when first making the transition from school or college to university. Indeed, a 2018 survey in the Centre for the Development of Academic Skills at Royal Holloway, University of London, revealed that students ranked academic reading as being their number one challenge during the first year of their degrees. So why is academic reading so challenging? Why is extensive reading so important? What is its function?

Why is academic reading so challenging?

Firstly, academic language and writing styles can be complex – more complex than you will have encountered at school or college. If you have undertaken any secondary reading before, it may well have been textbook or explanatory ‘introductions’ to the leading theorists or sources. For example, suppose you studied Russian History at A level. In this case, the syllabus requires you to ‘explore concepts such as Marxism, communism, Leninism and Stalinism, ideological control and dictatorship’ (AQA History 7042 Syllabus, p.53). However, it’s unlikely that you’ll actually have to read Marx’s original *Communist Manifesto* (1848), Lenin’s *The State and Revolution* (1917, or scholarly/theoretical works on ideological control. However, as an undergraduate, you will need to read and engage with these sorts of theoretical texts or academic reactions to them by subsequent scholars (maybe even your own lecturers). The writing style of such texts is complex, dense and often challenging, and it can often feel like you’re reading in a strange, different language. Stick with them, though – they are challenging for a reason – often because the content itself is meant to challenge you. Scientific writing, meanwhile, despite being precise, is often highly technical and reliant upon numerous acronyms and subject-specialist vocabulary. Again, this can take time to get to grips with, but with practice, it will become second nature.

Secondly, academic reading is supposed to be challenging, and is probably more challenging than ever because of the pace and accessibility of modern life. We live in a world where to ‘swipe left’ isn’t just reserved for a dating app or social media advert, but applies to nearly all our consumption of information. Social media, apps, news websites or nearly anything accessed via a smartphone or tablet are consumed via swiping or scrolling, often at speed. Indeed, how many of us are guilty of sharing something interesting on social media without actually having read it (we were only attracted by the headlines or picture, thought it looked interesting and then scrolled on)? Indeed, this has now led to the term ‘clickbait’. Academic reading (aside from skimming and scanning, which we will cover shortly) is very different – it requires focus, effort and hard thinking. This is why the novelist Virginia Woolf recommended slowing down and giving reading proper attention. ‘Wait for the dust of reading to settle; for the conflict and questioning to die down,’ Woolf suggests. ‘Walk, talk, pull the dead petals from a rose, or fall asleep’ (Woolf, 2014, p.75). I don’t necessarily recommend falling asleep here, but the point is that academic reading is difficult, it raises questions, and it needs time and contemplation. Given that reading speed and comprehension is often challenging for students with dyslexia, it is especially important to develop techniques for finding relevant information quickly and efficiently to give you more time and mental space/energy to devote to comprehension and contemplation. This chapter will show you how to do just that.

The purpose of reading

Reading at university is essential for two primary reasons:

1) To expand your knowledge of the subject and its writing conventions

Never lose sight of the fact that you came to university to learn, and not just to pass exams and gain a degree. You won't need all of your reading for your essay writing or exams – large quantities of it is simply to fill your brain with information, ideas, questions and skills which you hadn't previously encountered, and at a much higher level than that learnt at school or college. But additionally, as Steven Pinker has pointed out, 'good writers are avid readers. They have absorbed a vast inventory of words, idioms, constructions, tropes, and rhetorical tricks, and with them a sensitivity to how they mesh and how they clash. This is the elusive "ear" of a skilled writer' (2014, p.11). Wide reading, then, will help you to write well.

2) To find specific information for use in your academic writing (essays/exams)

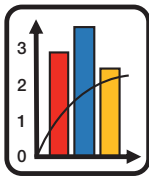
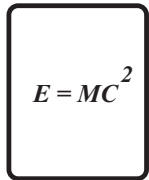
Here the purpose is driven entirely by what has been set by your lecturers in the assignment task/essay question. The task of finding and using specific information will primarily be informed by the reading you have done to expand your knowledge, so it is essential you read with both of these purposes in mind, rather than just focusing on reading for essay writing as your only priority. The two main purposes of reading are interrelated and inseparable – reading for knowledge will enrich your essay writing, and reading for specific information will enrich your knowledge. Try to view reading as a holistic process, and don't short-change yourself by only reading in preparation for assignments.

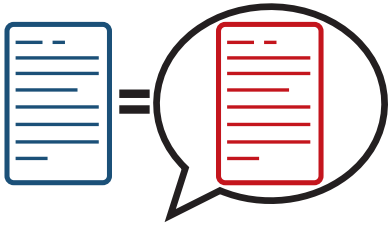
The reason you need to use sources in your writing is to demonstrate the following skills and abilities:

- That you have read around the subject and can conduct independent research.
- That you can select and prioritise appropriate sources and information, filtering out what is/is not needed.
- That you can harness evidence in support of your views /arguments. Throughout this book, evidence is visualised as a fingerprint, because, like a lawyer or police officer, you need to present evidence for your case/argument.
- That you can consider and evaluate arguments/counterarguments and integrate these into your argument.

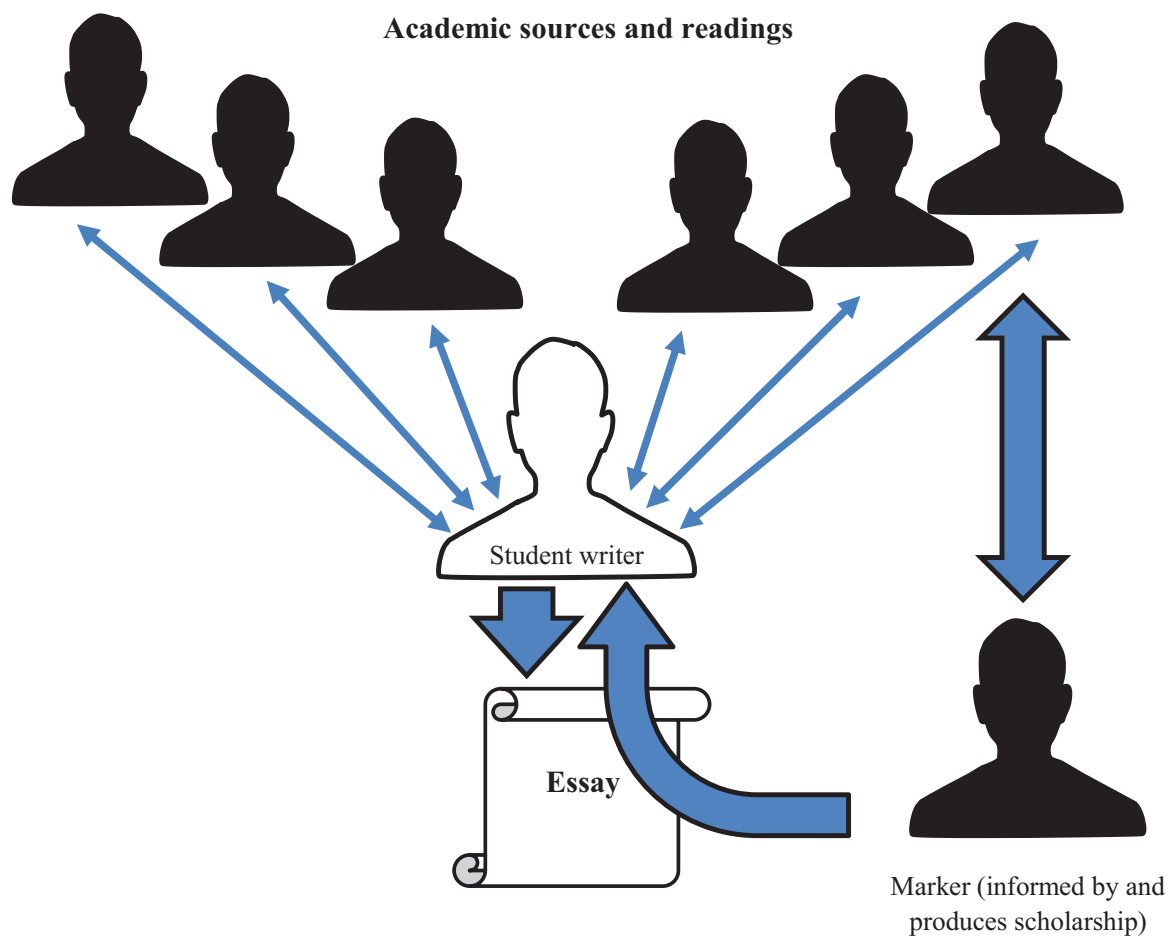


Evidence can take several forms, but the most common are as follows:

<i>Evidence:</i>	<i>Symbolic representation used in this book:</i>
Data and statistics	
Formulae	
Direct quotation from primary or secondary sources	

Summary of something from a primary or secondary source	
Paraphrase of something from a primary or secondary source	

Without adequate sources and background reading, your essays and assignments are likely to score poor marks. This is because your essays need to show how your ideas enter into an intellectual conversation with, are informed by, or even challenge, the work of others. In other words, academic writing, and university life generally, is largely dialogic:



It is essential, therefore, that you spend time reading and enriching your knowledge.

Types of sources

Not all sources are created equally, and some are more suitable than others. Which of these sources do you think might be the most appropriate for an essay about global warming?



1) Global temperature is subject to short-term fluctuations that overlay long-term trends and can temporarily mask them. The relative stability in surface temperature from 2002 to 2009, which has been dubbed the global warming hiatus by the media and some scientists, is consistent with such an episode. 2015 updates to account for differing methods of measuring ocean surface temperature measurements show a positive trend over the recent decade.



2) A recent spate of shark attacks in North Carolina may have been partly caused by global warming, an expert has claimed. The warmer weather not only brings sharks further north, but also entices more people to get into the water. Coupled with other factors such as higher salinity and an increased number of 'bait fish', this has supposedly created a 'perfect storm' of conditions for shark attacks.



3) Model calculations have, for the last decade, suggested that a doubling of CO₂ will lead to increases in globally averaged temperature of 1.5 to 5 degrees (NRC 83)...However, such large predictions suggest that the changes in CO₂ that have occurred over the last 150 years should already have produced warmings of 0.5-2 degrees. Yet the warming effect is logarithmic and increases in CO₂ have become progressively less influential.



The first source looks very useful indeed, gives a good overview of the main issues at stake and is written in an accessible yet authoritative manner. As such, you'd be forgiven for thinking that it is an entirely suitable source to use. However, it is taken from Wikipedia (2017). Many students wrongly use Wikipedia and often either quote from it in their essays or even copy and paste from it and try and pass passages off as their own work (plagiarism). One of the reasons the Wikipedia extract sounds so authoritative is because it is largely a patchwork of ideas, phrases and direct, but sometimes unattributed, quotations from academic sources, most notably Marion Henkel's book *21st Century Homestead: Sustainable Agriculture II* (2015). Wikipedia is undoubtedly a valuable source of information and is a great place to go as a STARTING POINT for your research, particularly for the references at the end of each article. However, none of the material on Wikipedia is subjected to 'peer review' (the process by which material is assessed by experts in the field before publication). This means that its quality and accuracy has not been independently validated and cannot be relied upon. Furthermore, markers often think that using Wikipedia looks 'lazy', as it is clear that the student has not done their own research or read anything that was recommended on their reading lists.



The second source comes from the *Daily Mail* newspaper (O'Callaghan, 2015). Again, this is an unsuitable source. Although the article cites 'an expert', it is merely a news report, and is neither academic nor peer reviewed. Indeed, many newspapers resort to rhetorical strategies and sometimes deliberate misrepresentation of the facts to scare (hence the story about shark attacks), inspire or sway their readers, either politically or ideologically. They are, therefore, overtly biased rather than neutral. As such, they cannot be used as an authority in your reading and writing (except if you were perhaps citing a newspaper or other media production as evidence of bias or as a cultural phenomenon).



The third source is from a journal article by Richard S. Lindzen, which appeared in the *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* (1990, p.289). Although perhaps not as entertaining as stories about shark attacks, the source is authoritative (since it is written by an eminent professor) and has been subjected to peer review before publication. Furthermore, notice how the argument is balanced in that the author subjects the ‘model calculations’ to scrutiny and analysis based on evidence. Not all academic sources are unbiased or even-handed, but there is a noticeable degree of critical analysis within their arguments, unlike the openly biased or inflammatory publications produced by newspapers or other mass-media outlets.

TIPS



Use only peer-reviewed, quality academic sources.



Steer clear of mass-media publications and websites.



Avoid online revision guides (these are aimed at A level or Access students and are thus too basic for undergraduates/postgraduates).

When reading at university, then, use mostly textbooks, monographs, edited collections and journal articles (as recommended by your lecturers). However, even some academic sources are more useful than others, and textbooks in particular need to be read with a different purpose in mind. Let’s look at how each can be used and why some might have distinct advantages and drawbacks.

Textbooks

What are they?

- Usually chronological or thematic introductory guides for students.
- Provide a synthesised summary of key events, topics or themes within an easily understood and accessible framework.
- Help students gain a sense of perspective and see the ‘big picture’/how everything fits together.

Do you think, then, that textbooks are a suitable source to use in your essays?



You might be surprised to learn that the answer is essentially no! A student textbook is an introduction to the subject, rather than a piece of original, academic research. Although this can make textbooks a handy, easily digestible source of information, they are a little too basic for use in essays. What you need is the ‘real deal’, the original academic source rather than merely a watered-down version or an introductory summary. By using journal articles and monographs, you will go deeper into the subject, use the original, authoritative sources and impress your marker with your ability to conduct research and engage with complex, higher-level thinking and theory. This will inevitably result in better marks.

TEXTBOOK TIPS



Use the bibliography as your cue to hit the library in search of the monographs and journal articles they recommend or cite.



Many textbooks provide quotes from the key theorists or critics working in the field and thus often highlight what is most important for you to read.



Textbooks are ideal for exam revision and for finding out about the main topics, key debates, who the key theorists are and what they said, and the overall context of the field, topic or discipline. This makes them an ideal starting point for your research and provides a good sense of perspective and the ‘big picture’, precisely what students with dyslexia find invaluable. Furthermore, as we shall see on p.38, they can help you understand the complexities of monographs and journal articles if you alternate between reading materials (dual assistive reading).

Monographs

What are they?

- Extended investigations/research of 60,000 words or more on a specific topic.
- Written primarily for academics and subject-specific professionals.
- Undergo an extensive 'peer-review' process to ensure academic integrity.

Pros



- Present up-to-date research when first published.
- Have convenient contents pages and indexes to help you find information quickly.
- Are academically robust and show that you have undertaken scholarly research.

Cons



- Obscurity (focus can be too narrow).
- Can be hard to read owing to subject technicalities and length.
- 'Date' rapidly.
- Students with dyslexia can easily become 'lost' whilst reading them as it's difficult to keep sight of the 'big picture'. This is particularly problematic if reading online (i.e. via Google Books or from a publisher's 'open access' portal).
- If borrowed from a library, you can't make notes on them or highlight passages with a pen; you can only use Post-it notes or bookmarks.
- Often unfeasible to print out large sections of the text (this could also breach copyright laws).

Journal articles

What are they?

- Short essays written by academics that investigate a problem/issue or present the results of research.
- Written primarily for academics and subject-specific professionals.
- Undergo an extensive 'peer-review' process to ensure academic integrity.

Pros



- Present up-to-date research.
- Usually have short abstracts providing a summary of the topic – this gives you a useful 'snapshot' of what the article is about and the main findings/argument.
- Are academically robust and show that you have undertaken scholarly research.
- Often accessible online through your university's library catalogue, Google Scholar or the publisher's website.
- Easy to print out, make notes on and carry with you.

Cons

- Obscurity (focus can be too narrow).
- Can be hard to read owing to subject technicalities.
- No index, so it can be harder to scan for specific information.

Edited collections

What are they?

- Short essays written by academics that investigate a problem/issue or present the results of research, but they are collected together by an academic editor around a core theme.
- Written primarily for academics and subject-specific professionals.
- Undergo an extensive ‘peer-review’ process to ensure academic integrity.

Pros

- Academically robust and show that you have undertaken scholarly research.
- Narrow focus, but grouped around a core, general theme.
- Relatively easy to print out, make notes on and carry with you if you only require one or two chapters.

Cons

- Obscurity (focus can be too narrow).
- Can be hard to read owing to subject technicalities.
- ‘Date’ rapidly.

All of the above sources can be accessed either in physical form (bought or borrowed from the university’s library) or in an electronic format (e-journal, e-book or viewed as a PDF document accessed via your library catalogue, Google Scholar or search engine). Whichever way you access them, ensure they are academic sources. Avoid the temptation to use websites (which are often easier to access as they can be found either through searches or hyperlinks). Unless the website is an authoritative source (e.g. WHO, government website, professional society website), avoid them or use them merely for familiarising yourself with the basics of a topic.

Academic reading and dyslexia

For students with dyslexia, reading can be problematic, disorientating, frustrating, and even demoralising. The following issues are often encountered:

- 1) Reading slowly and falling behind (the average non-dyslexic student can read approximately 200–250 words per minute as opposed to 90–120).
- 2) Having difficulty maintaining attention.
- 3) Losing sight of or completely forgetting what has just been read only a few pages previously.
- 4) Being unable to see the purpose of the reading.
- 5) Having difficulty following the argument advanced by the author.
- 6) Frustration at what has been termed ‘the paradox of dyslexia’ – namely that you read slowly but your brain works extremely quickly (Shaywitz, 1996). This means that readers with dyslexia can often ‘jump’ or anticipate what is going to be said on the next page but cannot remember what was said on the previous one. This can have a severe and negative impact on your self-esteem.

One of the biggest differences between a dyslexic and non-dyslexic reader is that people without dyslexia read in a linear, sequential manner, taking one step/sentence/paragraph/section/chapter at a time. People with dyslexia, on the other hand, need to see the 'bigger picture' and make connections based on 'gist' rather than detail. In other words, because the dyslexic brain can think and form connections quickly and from clues, it needs to be at the end of the paragraph or chapter at the same time as being at the beginning, thus getting a picture of the whole meaning in an instant. This is obviously impossible when reading word-by-word, line-by-line, and even chapter-by-chapter. The dyslexic brain, by preferring visual, 'big picture' thinking, is more than capable of seeing and comprehending the whole, but is constrained by the fact that the information is not present on the page in one, complete, entire and instantly comprehensible, preferably visual package. This can prove immensely frustrating and often leads to lapses in concentration and even boredom. But equally, some dyslexia and study skills specialists recommend strategies that make the problem even worse:



School teachers often get students with dyslexia to read even more slowly, 'sounding out' or pronouncing individual words. This focus on 'vocalisation' divorces words (and particularly clusters of words) from their meaning, leading to decreased comprehension.

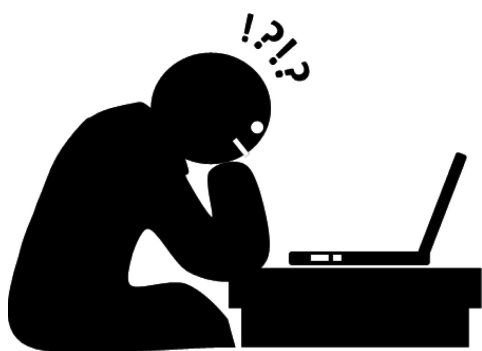


Being taught to slow down runs contrary to natural eye movements. By forcing yourself to read from left to right in a slow, careful and deliberate manner, you force the eyes out of their natural tendency to wander all over the page. Studies with high-speed cameras have proven that during reading the eyes can wander up to 18 times per minute (Toikka, 2008, p.4). Why not capitalise upon this tendency rather than forcing yourself to read more slowly and deliberately? By slowing down, you place greater visual stress upon your eyes, something which individuals with dyslexia often suffer from anyway.



Students with dyslexia are often told to use a pencil, ruler, finger or even a card to point to or exclude sections of text to help them maintain focus on the sentences and words they are reading, while blocking out what surrounds the words/sentences in question. This again slows the reader down and again runs counter to 1) the tendency of the eyes to wander and our ability to use 'peripheral' vision (which is capable of viewing between 5–7 words at a time) and 2) the preference readers with dyslexia have for making connections via 'gist'/clues. In other words, such techniques prevent you from seeing the 'big picture' of the sentence or paragraph and making connections between ideas, especially if sentences or paragraphs straddle lines or pages.

Dyslexia and reading online/electronically



Since the Covid-19 pandemic, reading materials that you might have accessed in hard copy in your university library have now moved almost entirely online. You can access these via your Moodle/Blackboard pages as PDFs or find them yourself via library catalogues or searches on Google Scholar. However, reading on a screen versus reading a hard copy of a book or journal article is VERY different. With a physical copy of a text, you undergo a fairly simple, logical, sequential process of reading from left to right. You see two pages simultaneously, without multiple distractions in the form of hyperlinks, adverts, 'clickbait' or even reminders to install updates! On-screen reading, however, involves not only reading from left to right, but scrolling up and

down and clicking, and more distractions are present. As such, reading online is 'nonlinear' because you are encouraged to jump from source to source, or article to article, via the use of hyperlinks (Carter, 2014). One advantage of this is that it encourages skimming and scanning (which we shall discuss shortly), but deep, concentrated reading is more difficult because of the greater number of distractions – not good if you have dyslexia. Indeed, on the back of research conducted by Hooper and Herath (2014), it has been suggested that 'concentration, comprehension, absorption and recall rates' when reading online are all worse, and thus Google, if not the internet itself, 'makes us stupid' (p.9). This is probably a rather unfair assessment! Certainly, reading online can be more superficial, but provided you exploit its benefits as a research tool, it's

actually a really effective way of learning. Indeed, providing you keep focused and avoid drowning in hyperlinks, skimming and scanning across information suit the ability of students with dyslexia to read quickly and decipher the ‘big picture’. Undoubtedly, more discipline is required to stay focused. For this reason, it’s better to print the material out or copy and paste the text into a separate document (e.g. Word, OneNote) if possible when you find useful information. This helps minimise distractions and enables you to engage in more focused, deep reading.

TIPS AND NOTES OF CAUTION FOR ONLINE READING



Ensure your device is up to date and has installed updates before you start reading (or schedule them for a time when you are not studying). This will help minimise unwanted distractions and interruptions.



Experiment with your Internet Service Provider’s ‘Homework’ settings. Yes, this is designed for parents to block children from gaming and social media during certain times, but if you suffer from a lack of self-discipline, you can set times for yourself to help keep you on track. There are also many settings available now that restrict screen time (to help you have breaks) and avoid online distractions. Again, whilst they’re mainly designed for use by parents, they’re good to set up yourself to help keep you on track!



As we’ll discuss in the next chapter, reading online requires much greater discipline in terms of critical thinking. You’ll need to work doubly hard when reading online to ensure that your reading is **authentic, authoritative and academic**.



If you copy and paste text into separate documents to read without distractions, ensure you copy and paste the source or webpage. Then, if you use the material in your essays, you can reference it properly. Too much copying and pasting without remembering where everything came from can lead to ‘patching’ – a scenario where your essay is a casserole of words, sentences and even passages that are not your own, which can lead you to accusations of plagiarism.

Note of caution regarding immersive reading/learning tools

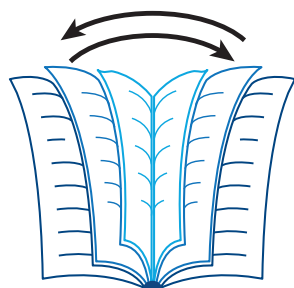
The difficulties people with dyslexia have with reading have spawned an e-learning/assistive technology industry. Some apps, learning tools and assistive technologies are undoubtedly helpful, but they slow you down too much. For example, the immersive reader tool in OneNote usefully allows you to decode words and phrases by combining highlighting and voice readout (thereby exploiting two senses). Meanwhile, the comprehension tool can highlight verbs and bracket subordinate clauses, thus allowing information to be broken down into smaller units. Similarly, scanning pens can be great for helping you to understand difficult words and allow you to scan words, paragraphs and even pages, hear them read aloud, hear/read dictionary definitions and even transfer text to your computer. This can all be incredibly helpful if you have limited reading abilities. However, these strategies and interventions are too slow and do not allow you to grasp the ‘big picture’ and make connections. In effect, whilst helpful in certain circumstances, in equal measure, these techniques constrain your dyslexic strengths. So, in summary, use assistive technologies if you find them helpful (and if you need coloured backgrounds, OneNote provides an array that can help you read on the screen), but they are more useful for detailed reading and basics rather than reading long academic texts, finding information quickly and making use of your dyslexic strengths in ‘big picture’ thinking.

Reading techniques: skimming and scanning

Given your dyslexia and the challenges outlined above, what is needed is a reading strategy which allows you to grasp the ‘big picture’ quickly while avoiding long, unproductive, frustrating and even demoralising reading sessions. A form of speed reading is the answer. Indeed, ‘speed reading’ is an activity in which people with dyslexia can excel. One prominent advocate of speed reading, George Stancliffe, claims that individuals with dyslexia are usually ‘gifted’ when it comes to rapid reading, primarily because the right hemisphere of the brain is precisely where such rapid, holistic reading occurs (2003). The issue of time/speed here is crucial, and is something which, rather than causing anxiety, can be turned into a strength. The reading process needs to be quick to tap into your brain’s ability to form ideas rapidly from clues/‘gist’ while also minimising the risk of ‘zoning out’, reading on ‘autopilot’, and thus not understanding what is being read.

One of the most effective ways of speed reading is to practise the skills and processes associated with skimming and scanning (some aspects of which are referred to as the SQ3R approach). In what follows, we will go through these skills in detail but relate the processes involved to visual icons, which can act as quick references to/explanations of the activity being undertaken. Use these as ‘big picture’ prompts to keep focused on the different stages involved. Detailed, close, analytical reading and critical thinking will be covered in the next chapter.

Skimming



As the name and the icon on the left suggest, skimming is a very superficial, fast activity which requires little depth. For this reason, we can visualise it as akin to flicking through the pages of a book. It is a great technique to acquire a sense of the ‘big picture’, overall structure and content of the text quickly. Lecturers will sometimes recommend that you read an entire book or article. Thus, it might seem as though there is little point in skimming, or that it is too superficial. Not so. Skimming gives you a good sense of the entire text, so it is a vital preparatory exercise for students with dyslexia to do so that when the text is read in-depth, the various elements you read can be seen within the context of the whole. In the case of extended reading lists or ‘recommended reading’, it is very tempting to think

that you should read the texts from cover to cover. Indeed, sometimes it can feel like cheating not to do so. However, as a student, you are looking to find RELEVANT information QUICKLY, so skimming is an effective way of doing this, and it can be a valuable technique for very quickly assessing whether it’s going to be worth reading the text at all or, if so, which parts might be read or excluded. So, what sort of things are you looking for when you skim read a book or article? In order of importance, you should pay particular attention to the following:

1) Title and subtitle

Occasionally, titles can be a little cryptic or abstract, but generally, the title and subtitle can give you valuable clues as to whether the book or article is worth reading. Imagine you are researching the benefits of Higher Education on society in the UK for an assignment. A search in a library catalogue might offer the following results. Let’s decipher and evaluate the potential usefulness of each in turn:

This author has used the question type main heading to pose a cryptic, contentious and thought provoking topic. There are some potentially very interesting ideas here but the article’s relevance is not immediately clear.

1) Adrianna Kezar, ‘Obtaining Integrity?’

Reviewing and Examining the Charter between Higher Education and Society’,
The Review of Higher Education, 27:4 (2004), pp.429-459.

The emphasis upon the word ‘review’ again indicates an approach which is underpinned by critical analysis, but the emphasis on ‘higher education’ narrows the focus and makes it immediately relevant.

The subheading clarifies the problem and narrows the focus down to the supposed ‘charter’ between higher education and society. This looks immediately of interest, even if it raises more questions than it solves. The verbs ‘reviewing’ and ‘examining’ also seem useful because we may be able to gain some useful critical analysis in the light of current developments (as of 2004).

2) Thomas Docherty, *For the University: Democracy and the Future of the Institution* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

The text is a monograph produced by a reputable publisher and as such it is clearly an authoritative and suitable source. Of the three texts under consideration it is the most up to date, which makes it even more useful for our assignment.

The main heading immediately identifies a political position, namely that the author is arguing 'for' the university and everything which such establishments and their underlying principles stand for or represent. The fact that this author is arguing 'for' universities also hints at the possibility of an underlying problem or threat which needs to be countered. Although interesting, the main heading doesn't seem of immediate relevance to our purposes.

The subheading seems far more relevant as it immediately identifies the issue of democracy and the future of universities, although at this stage it is not clear whether democracy refers to societal democracy or democracy within the institution itself.

3) Ronald Barnett, 'Knowledge, Higher Education, and Society: A Postmodern Problem', *Oxford Review of Education*, 19:1 (1993), pp.33-46.

The subtitle narrows the focus to the issue of postmodernism and the fact that the aforementioned issues are a 'problem' of some sort. There could be tensions between the three aspects of education mentioned in the main title, which makes it seem not only relevant, but may present revealing and useful ideas about the drawbacks of considering higher education in respect of 'benefits'. There is no mention of the UK, which, along with the 'big' issues identified in the main title, indicates that the book is more theoretical or conceptual rather than focused on a specific context (although we may find a specific chapter on the UK in the contents page or in the index, so it might be worth digging deeper).

The main title indicates three distinct, but possibly interrelated or competing aspects of the topic, all three of which are relevant to the assignment task.

The title of the journal identifies it as credible, reputable and peer-reviewed academic source and thus a suitable article to use. The word 'review' appears to indicate a possible emphasis upon critical approaches to education studies. The article is clearly somewhat dated, and this limits its applicability to today's situation (especially if we are seeking data), although the indications of a philosophical approach may mean that it has ongoing relevance

They always say you should 'never judge a book by its cover', but as you can see here, you can get an awful lot of information from titles. They can give you a good indication of how relevant they are to your task, so always pay attention to them.

2) Abstract or synopsis

As we saw above, some titles contain keywords or statements which are of immediate relevance to the topic under consideration, whereas others are more cryptic or ambiguous. To clarify whether these texts are likely to be useful, the next step is to look at the abstract or synopsis. Journal articles have abstracts (located at the beginning of the article or as part of a 'preview' online), and monographs have a synopsis (usually either on the back cover or inside the front cover). In both cases, they consist of one or two short paragraphs which outline what the text is about. They usually identify:

- 1 The subject matter.
- 2 The research problem or context and why it matters.
- 3 The argument.
- 4 Methods or approach.
- 5 Key results or findings.
- 6 The implications of the research.

So, digging a little deeper, let's see if Roland Barnett's abstract can help us decide how useful his article may be for our assignment:

In modern society, knowledge, higher education and society act upon each other as separate forces. Two contemporary analytical frameworks help to illuminate this triangle of forces, but the stories they tell seem opposed to each other. Critical theory points up the skewed character of rationality in modern society: on this view, the changing definitions of knowledge in higher education can be said to be a shift in the direction of instrumental reason, with other (hermeneutic and critical) forms or reason being down-played. Postmodernism, on the other hand, argues not for any such one-dimensionality but underscores a heterogeneity of thought forms. Higher education can be viewed in this way, too: the university is a social institution which celebrates differentiation of forms of thought. Can the circle be squared? Can these differences between critical theory and postmodernism – as interpretations of higher education – be reconciled? This paper argues that they can be.

The subject matter and the 'problem' seem relevant but only from a strictly theoretical perspective. Questions about the interrelationships between society, knowledge and higher education are clarified through the fact that they are a 'triangle of forces'. This may be very relevant to our assignment. 

Although the background to the two opposed theoretical approaches is illuminating, it may not be of relevance to our assignment, especially if we want to focus upon 'benefits' rather than getting into detail about theory. 

Clear identification of an argument, namely that the 'triangle of forces' can be reconciled within the modern university, thereby having a positive impact on society. 

What is also important about abstracts and synopses is that they often contain keywords (as underlined above). Keep an eye out for these to see whether they match what you are looking for. If the abstract/synopsis looks of interest and is relevant to what you are looking for, then read further. If it does not, reject it in favour of more immediately useful material.

3) Contents page/chapter titles

Chapter titles can also sometimes be cryptic, but the contents page should be your next port of call when skimming a text. Look for keywords or phrases which are relevant in the titles and reject any chapters which do not appear to be immediately relevant. Again, time is of the essence here – don't waste time reading chapters that might be interesting but ultimately irrelevant. Don't waste time reading them because you feel not doing so will be cheating (especially if the text has appeared on a mandatory reading list). For example, in the case of Docherty's monograph, we can see that only around half of the book is of direct relevance to our purposes, even though the rest of the book may be very interesting indeed:

Introduction:

For the University

Looks useful for background information and getting a 'gist' of Docherty's argument.



Chapter 1: First Principles:

The University of the Idea

Looks promising in respect of the theoretical underpinnings of what universities are supposed to be about.



Chapter 2: The Student Experience:

Living Learning, Living Teaching

Chapter 3: A Terrifying Silence:

Spaces of Research from Discovery to Surveillance

Seems unrelated to the topic / assignment – not a clear enough emphasis on 'benefits to society'.



Chapter 4: Leadership:

Legitimation and Authority

Chapter 5: Assessment:

Controlling Conformity

Looks useful in terms of addressing how assessment might not be conducive to critical thinking and thus democracy.



Chapter 6: Finance:

Money for Value

If looking at 'benefits' from a financial perspective, this may well be the most useful chapter.



4) Index

The index is probably the most overlooked resource at your disposal. If you have access to a good index, finding the information you want can be very quick and efficient. Some books have two indexes, one for key names, critics, authors or theorists and one for topics. Simply find the keyword or name you want and then look up the page number and find the issue/individual under consideration by scanning (more on scanning below). Let's have a look at snapshots from Docherty's topic index (pp.196–197) to see if there is anything that might relate specifically to our assignment:

- 114–5
- teachers and students reduced to 105, 116
- identity-politics
 - is anti-democratic 32–4
 - is conservative 31–4
 - and modules 87, 89–90
 - and victimhood 31
- imagination
 - as action or transformation 49–50, 54–6, 90
 - and freedom 35, 48, 50–1
 - threatens conservatism 47, 85
- impact
 - of 1968, 10
 - and faculties 19
 - damages scholarship and research 12, 16, 92–3
 - and leadership 120
 - misappropriates public funds 92–3
- information
 - and assessment 138
 - opposed to knowledge 20–1, 94, 139
 - replaces justice 139
- interdisciplinarity
 - politicises research 15–16
 - and faculties 18
- inventiveness
 - and assessment 7
- knowledge
 - as commodity 37–8, 42, 94
 - defence and 73
 - confuse with information 127, 139
 - legitimisation of 37, 55, 77
 - opinion and 40
 - knowledge-transfer 21
 - false communication model 41
 - and totalitarianism 38
- law 19, 173
- leadership 96–124
 - assessment and 126
 - ethics and 121
 - hierarchical vs democratic 6
- learning, *see student experience*
- lego 82–3, 87–91
- management
 - as bureaucratic reason 35
 - as substitute for leadership 116–7
 - as substitute for knowledge 19–20, 53, 85, 127
 - markets and 57–8
 - of play 56–7, 60
 - vs principle 3
 - ‘right to manage’ 1–2
- market, *see also Broune, fees*
 - and assessment 127, 149
 - and barbarism 32

The issues surrounding imagination and how they relate to autonomy and democracy appear to be very interesting for discussions of the place of higher education in relation to society and freedom, whilst equally, the commodification of knowledge and its transfer have direct applicability to the issue of ‘benefits’ (or otherwise).



- modernisation
 - authoritarianism and 40, 103–4, 106
 - damages community 103–4, 106
 - produces conformity 39–40, 105–6
 - and fees 170
 - ‘Value-for-Money’ and 70–1
- modules
 - and atomised knowledge 5–6, 82–90
 - and commodification of knowledge 37–9, 41, 51–2, 88, 152
 - reduce freedom 89
 - damage research 78, 84, 86–7
- music 46–8, 174
- play
 - and fiction 108–9
 - central to University 53–6, 65
 - elimination of 60
 - marketised 57, 61
 - and politics 14, 56
 - and science 77, 82
- payment-by-results
 - and examination 129–30
 - and grade inflation 142
 - still operative 134–5, 137, 139
- peer-review 134–5
- quadrivium 18
- quality (including QAA),
 - and assessment 147
 - and mistrust 3, 104, 145–6
 - damages leadership 106, 162
 - damages learning and teaching 39, 57, 105, 144, 162
 - and narcissism 37, 39–40
 - confuses standards and standardisation 151–2, 162
 - social engineering and 153
 - damages traditions 104
 - proliferates validations 37, 57
- research 5, 68–95
 - authority and 91
 - and doubt 50, 79–81
 - travestied by modularisation 39, 90–1
- research-led teaching 94
- skills 21, 153–5
- social mobility 17, 35, 42
 - damaged by ‘student experience’ 63
 - travestied as ‘journey’ 63
 - and widening participation 168–9
- space
 - as commodity 70, 85, 140–1

Again, the issue of knowledge in respect of freedom and autonomy comes up, but perhaps more immediately relevant to the discussion about the ‘benefits’ of higher education are in relation to social mobility, so these pages definitely need consulting.



TIPS



The index can help you narrow down which aspects of the chapter identified in the contents page are relevant, so use them in conjunction with each other.



Not all indexes are as good as the one above and not all have subdivisions under each term. This is why you can’t necessarily rely upon them and why you need all of the other skimming skills.

5) Subheadings

Skim through the text and look for subheadings (just like the ones used here!), which can be invaluable in helping you to navigate the chapters and sections and can help you decide which are worth reading. In particular, look out for keywords (e.g. multiculturalism, profiteering or European Convention on Human Rights),

key names (e.g. Shakespeare, Einstein or Obama) and key verbs (e.g. analysis, processing or applying). These will give you an excellent indication of what the section is about, and like titles, an immediate impression of its usefulness and relevance.

6) Imagery

'A picture is worth a thousand words' may well be a popular English idiom, but visual material really is an essential part of grasping meaning from a text quickly when scanning – especially given that individuals with dyslexia have particular strengths in visualising ideas. Skim the text for diagrams, photographs, maps, graphs, pie charts, icons, bullet points or any other visual indicators of meaning. Humanities subjects tend to have less visual material, but the sciences and social sciences use them frequently (depending on the subject). Obviously, some visuals may be quite technical, but generally, any visual material, especially if a brief written explanation or key accompanies it, can help you quickly understand what the subject is about or what the key findings may be.

7) Introductions

Introductions can be a useful place to focus upon when skimming. Even if the text you are reading has an abstract, the introduction can still be an excellent place to start as it can provide valuable, immediate information about the study and its implications. Introductions are useful because they usually give the reader the following information:

- What the book/study/chapter is about.
- Why it's important.
- Some background to 'set the scene' and give the study a context.
- The purpose of the study.
- An argument.

In other words, the introduction gives us a sense of the 'big picture' and additional context over and above that provided by the abstract or synopsis. For this reason, it is an invaluable tool in the task of assessing the usefulness and relevance of the text, and it can provide a snapshot of what we need to know about the subject and why it's important. At that point, we can make an informed decision as to whether to continue reading or not.

8) Conclusions

Conclusions can also be a valuable source of immediate information, especially in journal articles or essays in edited collections. They can sometimes be a little disorientating as obviously, you only have a limited idea of what the author has said throughout the rest of the text, but they can be an effective way of quickly finding out the following information:

- Whether the author's argument/thesis/research hypothesis has been proven or disproven (or was perhaps unsuccessful).
- The key, headline results.
- Why the study matters – how it has changed our understanding of the subject and its impact in relation to the world or the discipline.
- What further questions need answering or what further research needs undertaking.

In many respects, then, a good conclusion can again give us a snapshot of the 'big picture' (both of the research and its implications). This will provide you with a sense (in addition to that gleaned from the abstract, synopsis, introduction, imagery and subheadings) of whether it is relevant and useful and thus worth reading in more depth.

9) Assisted online navigation

If you're reading online, skimming can be greatly assisted by some journal websites which very usefully offer help with article navigation and key information BEFORE you decide to download the PDF version. In some very good/helpful cases, you can jump to the sections of information you want using the navigation panes and keyword links. Often, keywords and theorists/references can be hyperlinked. This can be useful

for skimming because they are coloured blue, but they also allow skimming by clicking on them to quickly find further information that may/may not be relevant. In some, even the main ‘highlights’ of the article are pulled out and bullet-pointed (perhaps even with keywords hyperlinked to the relevant sections in the article). This will save you even having to read the abstract. Here’s one such example with further suggested reading and links and with various options to download or do further, advanced searches:

The screenshot shows the ScienceDirect article page for 'Reading network in dyslexia: Similar, yet different' by Karen E. Waldie et al. The page includes a 'Download PDF' button, a search bar, a list of recommended articles, a 'Citing articles' section, and an 'Article Metrics' section. The article's highlights and abstract are also visible.

Annotations:

- Download for deep, more focused reading:** Points to the 'Download PDF' button.
- Convenient search facility for the entire collection:** Points to the 'Search ScienceDirect' bar.
- Easily accessible referencing details to aid with bibliography and in-text citations in your essay:** Points to the article title and volume information.
- Recommendations for similar, useful reading:** Points to the 'Recommended articles' section.
- Indication of popularity and impact:** Points to the 'Article Metrics' section, which shows citation indexes, captures, and social media shares.
- Headlines with hyperlinked key terms (definitions):** Points to the 'Highlights' section, which lists key findings with hyperlinked terms like 'neural activation' and 'dyslexia'.
- Abstract – easy to access before committing to download:** Points to the 'Abstract' section, which provides a summary of the study.

Article Details:

Brain and Language
Volume 174, November 2017, Pages 29-41

Reading network in dyslexia: Similar, yet different

Karen E. Waldie^a, Anne J. Wilson^b, Reece P. Roberts^a, David Moreau^{a, R}

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bandl.2017.07.004>

Highlights

- We used a word-rhyming task to measure differences in neural activity between dyslexics and typical readers.
- Our findings show that dyslexics and typical readers do not use the reading network similarly.
- Specifically, similar neural activation did not reflect similar behavioral performance.
- Reading performance was positively correlated with activation in the right STG and the bilateral insula only in dyslexics.
- These findings challenge the idea that normalization of neural activity is essential to remediate dyslexia.

Abstract

Dyslexia is a developmental disorder characterized by reading and phonological difficulties, yet important questions remain regarding its underlying neural correlates. In this study, we used partial least squares (PLS), a multivariate analytic technique, to investigate the neural networks used by dyslexics while performing a word-rhyming task. Although the overall reading network was largely similar in dyslexics and typical readers, it did not correlate with behavior in the same way in the two groups. In particular, there was a positive association between reading performance and both right superior temporal gyrus and bilateral insula activation in dyslexic readers but a negative correlation in typical readers. Together with differences in lateralization unique to dyslexics, this suggests that the combination of poor reading performance with high insula activity and atypical laterality is a consistent marker of dyslexia. These findings emphasize the importance of understanding right-hemisphere activation in dyslexia and provide promising directions for the remediation of reading disorders.

Recommended articles

- Common activation in the surface dyslexia and CAT
- Brain and Language, Volume 174, 2017, pp. 50-60
- Download PDF
- View details
- Reading in dyslexia across literacy development...
- NeuroImage, Volume 144, Part A, 2017, pp. 92-100
- Download PDF
- View details
- A longitudinal study investigating neural proce...
- Cortex, Volume 93, 2017, pp. 206-219
- Download PDF
- View details

Citing articles (10)

Article Metrics

Citations

Citation Indexes: 10

Captures

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Readers: 125

Social Media

Shares, Likes & Comments: 16

Tweets: 4

Previous article in issue **Next article in issue**

TIP

When downloading recommended articles, ensure that you keep track of the links you have followed (see point 11 below).

10) Topic sentences

A topic sentence is the first sentence you will come across when you read a new paragraph. You can find them by looking for indentations or spaces between the paragraphs. The significance of topic sentences for skimming is that:

- a) They are very easy to find.
- b) They should contain two core ingredients that will tell you an awful lot about the paragraph's content.

We will look more closely at how to write topic sentences in Chapter 5, but the key thing to remember is that all good topic sentences should contain:

- 1) A clear identification of the topic.
- 2) An indication of an argument or provable opinion.

These two ingredients should give you an obvious and immediate idea of whether the paragraph will be useful or relevant. So, let's look at some examples. Imagine you need to write an essay about post-war British cinema and culture. Based on a cursory skim of the title, contents page and introduction, a book entitled *British Culture of the Postwar: An Introduction to Literature and Society 1945–1999* by Alistair Davies and Alan Sinfield (2000) appears to be relevant, particularly the chapter 'A Cinema in Between: Post-war British Cinema', pp.110–123. Let's look at some topic sentences from this chapter to evaluate their usefulness and relevance:

Paragraph	Topic sentence	Core themes	Relevance	Topic sentence reflects paragraph content
1	'Had matters taken a different course, Brighton and Hove (where some of the earliest British film-makers were based) rather than Hollywood might now be the centre of world cinema'.	Background to the initial creativeness of British cinema, why it declined, and why Hollywood was so successful.		Yes
2	'Despite quotas, tariffs, tax advantages and subsidies to domestic producers, European national cinemas have been unable to reverse the domination of Hollywood'.	Background to the rise of Hollywood and falling cinema attendance.		Yes, mostly
3	'Until the 1950s, cinema-going had been for most British families their favourite form of entertainment, but with the advent of the television (Independent Television began to broadcast in 1955) they preferred to stay at home or to spend their disposable income on new consumer goods and on other leisure pursuits'.	Figures on falling cinema attendance and more recent rise in multiplexes as an outlet for Hollywood films.		Yes
4	'Nothing provides a more striking illustration of these issues than the British situation in the late 1940s'.	In-depth discussion of the British market, government subsidies, import duties on American films, pressures from the American government and the appeal of American glamour absent from post-war Britain owing to austerity.		Yes

As you can see here, the topic sentences give a largely accurate summary of what is within the paragraph. As such, during skimming you can quickly narrow down which paragraphs are of relevance, which are perhaps of limited use, and which are not worth reading. All the above paragraphs look entirely relevant to our topic and provide both good background information as well as specific time periods, trends and influences.

A note of caution

Textbooks, collected essays and introductory monographs such as the one above are usually written with a student audience in mind and are thus fairly accessible. Topic sentences in some journal articles and monographs, on the other hand, are occasionally less clear. This can be owing to the obscurity and complexity of the issues discussed, because the writing itself is of dubious quality (even though the research may be groundbreaking!) or because the writer wrongly presumes that only specialists will read the work. Let's look at a slightly less student-friendly text to see how the topic sentences differ. Imagine you are researching the issue of freedom of speech in readiness for an essay on freedom and democracy in the UK. A book entitled *Extreme Speech and Democracy*, edited by Ivan Hare and James Weinstein (2009), looks useful, particularly the chapter 'Freedom of Speech in a Globalised World' by Dieter Grimm, pp.11–22. Let's have a look at the first six topic sentences to see well they reflect the content of the paragraph:

<i>Paragraph</i>	<i>Topic sentence</i>	<i>Core themes</i>	<i>Topic sentence reflects paragraph content</i>
1	'There is no democracy without public discourse and no public discourse without freedom of speech, freedom of the media, and freedom of information'.	Mutual links between freedom of speech and democracy.	
2	'Most socialist constitutions contained a right to free speech'.	Link between socialism and freedom of speech with examples. Specific case of Australia introduced.	Partly 
3	'The High Court reasoned that the Constitution declares Australia to be a democracy, and that there is no way to be a democracy without a recognition of freedom of speech'.	Specific example of the Australian legal framework guaranteeing freedom of speech and the mutual importance of democracy and freedom of speech.	
4	'This is of some importance because it shows that freedom of speech does not derive its raison d'être from democracy'.	Free speech a necessary element for individuality, yet it is not an absolute right since it can harm others.	Topic sentence and content misaligned and unclear. 
5	'Even a country whose constitution reads 'Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech', as does the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, recognises that not all speech is protected'.	Not all speech is protected, and there is a difference in the purpose for which free speech is protected and its limitations – examples of Chinese vs. Canadian and South African Constitutions.	Topic sentence seems to indicate a focus on US, but this is not really what the paragraph is about. 

As you can see, not all topic sentences, especially in academic monographs and journal articles, are accurate in mapping out what the rest of the paragraph will discuss. As such, whilst topic sentences are an extremely valuable tool in helping you skim for information, do not necessarily rely upon them. You may need to dig deeper to find the information you need.

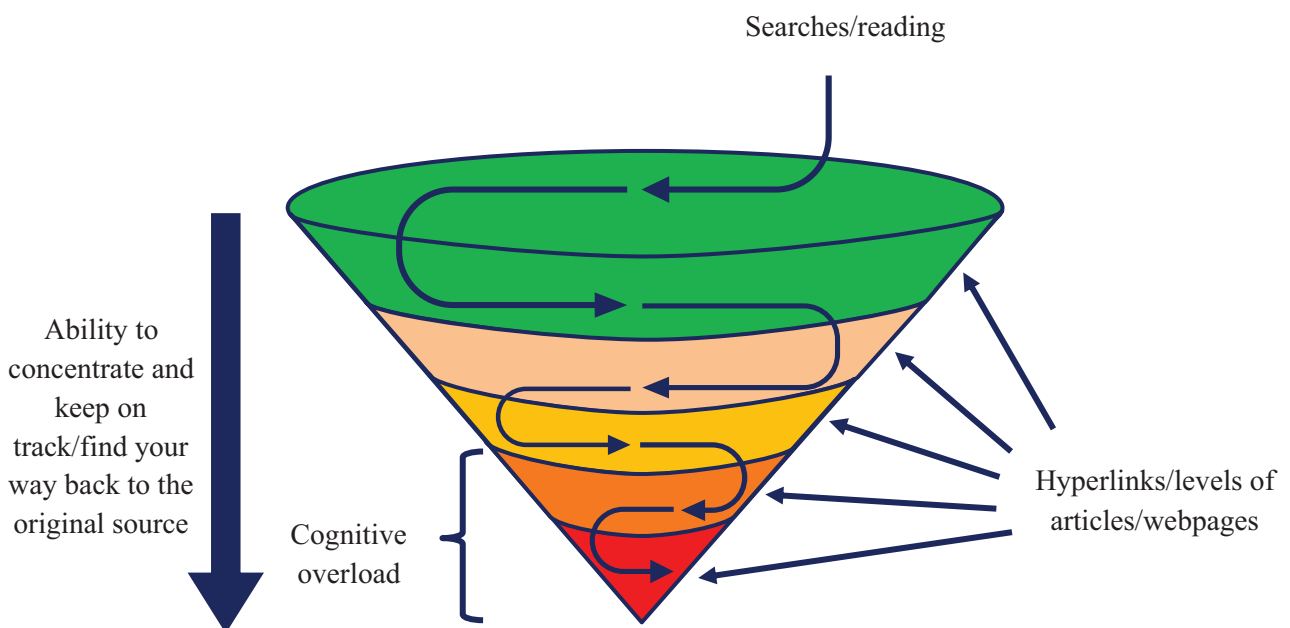
11) Hyperlinks

If you're reading online, hyperlinks can be phenomenally useful as signposts to relevant or additional material. They can even support understanding of complex issues if they link to explanations or definitions (as we saw above), or if hovering over the hyperlink allows a box to appear with supplementary information or the complete reference. This can enable easy, instant comprehension. In academic materials, there tend not to be many hyperlinks (or they may just allow the reference to appear). However, when reading or searching purely to research or gather ideas, hyperlinks can be everywhere and in almost every line. This can be very useful as way of quickly skimming for information and can allow you to quickly delve into other pieces of information and link pieces of information together (thus allowing you to exploit your 'big picture' thinking, 'gist' and speed-reading strengths). However, you could end up in a scenario where you have clicked on so many hyperlinks that the following somewhat disorientating issues arise:

- The original article and focus have disappeared (often when you follow a link, the browser goes to the new article without you still seeing the original). Try to open new articles in new tabs so that you can flick between them. HOWEVER...
- You can end up having so many tabs open that it's difficult to backtrack to the original focus/article.
- Trying to 'tidy' your browser by closing tabs can lead you to overcompensating and deleting the most important / original tabs. Consequently, your search has to start again (using the browser's 'history' can help, but it all takes time and is a distraction).

Avoid drowning in a vortex of hyperlinks by focusing on your priorities. If you don't, your concentration/ability to focus and keep on track will get more and more difficult, and ultimately, you'll experience cognitive overload:

Hyperlink vortex:



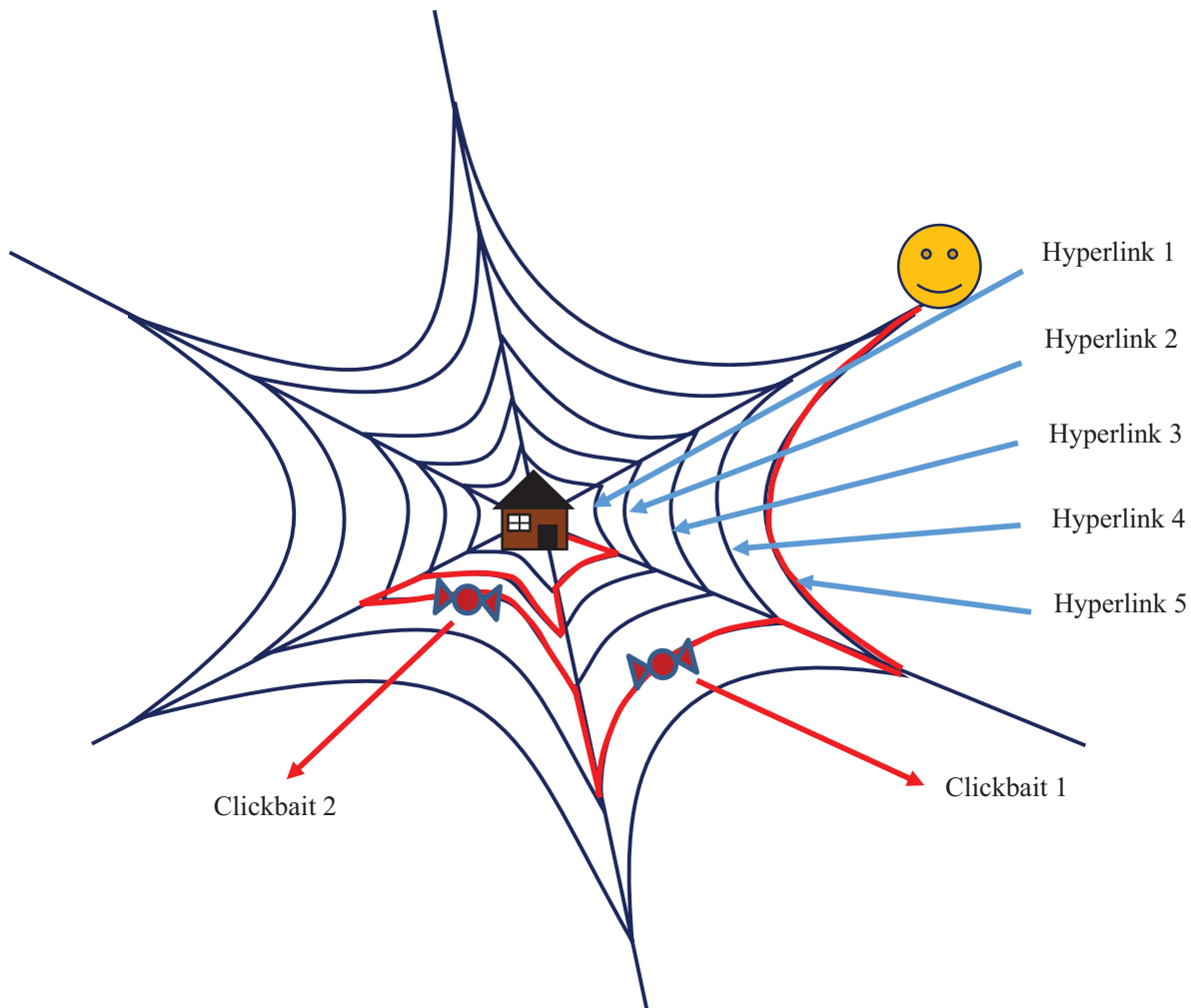
The following three tests should help keep you on track:

- 1) Is the hyperlinked source/article strictly relevant? If yes, follow it; if not, avoid.
- 2) Does it add detail to the original focus, or does it tempt you off onto a tangent?
- 3) Does it ultimately get you to an academic source or piece of verifiable data/evidence? If yes, follow it. If not, avoid.

When and if a new link is opened, skim for relevant detail by looking for subheadings, imagery, introductions, conclusions, topic sentences, and only then look at other hyperlinks. Don't open further hyperlinks until you have subjected them to the three tests above, and CLOSE the new tab/link to get back to where you started before continuing.

It can be helpful to remember that the internet is literally a worldwide ‘web’. But it’s crucial to keep in mind the structure of the web – YOUR web of searching and reading. This is crucial because once you start following the hyperlinks, the web structure can’t be seen and you can get lost in a maze of ‘clickbait’ material that is out there which is designed to tempt you away from your goal. Make sure you keep in mind how you can backtrack to ‘base’ or your original starting point/article/link:

World Wide Web of Hyperlinks:



TIPS



Copy and paste useful links into a references and sources document so you can keep track of where you got the information from, and so you can get back to that information quickly.



Avoid ‘clickbait’ – they are designed to tempt and distract you with seemingly interesting or attractive information. However, like sweets (as indicated above), they might look nice and give quick, easily digested information, but they may not necessarily be good for you!



ALWAYS get yourself to the **authentic, authoritative and academic** information and sources as soon as possible – that’s your goal at all times when following hyperlinks.

12) Skimming to make and find connections

Given that skimming is about finding relevant information quickly, it may be that either:

- The source you are looking at turns out not to be useful, or
- The source is not useful but contains links to sources which might be useful (and which in turn will require skimming to see if they are useful or not).

You can skim to find connections in the following ways:

- 1) Look at the further reading/references section (usually at the end of the book next to the index, or at the end of each chapter, like in this book). Skim down the references for keywords related to your topic and then search for that source using your library catalogue or Google Scholar.
- 2) If you skim the text and find some relevant information, it may be that it is covered in more depth in another source. Such sources should be referenced, so skim for them in the references section (this will be either in a references/works cited section at the end of the book/chapter, and/or will appear as footnotes or endnotes, depending on the publisher/discipline).
- 3) Skim all the search results in your Google Scholar or library catalogue searches. This can be a useful way of making connections as often the results are ranked according to relevance.

Another more recent tool you can use to skim and make connections between sources is the web resource www.connectedpapers.com. This platform allows you to make meaningful graphs that enable you to visualise connections between sources by date, number of citations and connections. Each graph depicts the sources as 'nodes' which are based on the similarity of articles/subjects, so it's very easy to find additional sources. Indeed, the size of each 'node' corresponds with how popular/influential they are based on citations (the number of times other academics have referenced them and used their research). This can give you an instant idea of their 'impact' on the academic world. The colour of the 'nodes' also indicates the age of the paper, so it's not only possible to see in an instant connections between papers, but also their popularity and how recent they are. This will enable you to find up-to-date papers (in the past, students often had to use merely what articles their university library had in stock, and this often meant that sources were considerably out of date!). The platform even enables you to preview the abstracts so that you can quickly skim them and ascertain the usefulness and relevance of the source. Given that the platform and the graphs are visual (and depict the connections visually and in a meaningful way), it is especially useful for students with dyslexia.

Let's take the source above, *Extreme Speech and Democracy*, edited by Ivan Hare and James Weinstein (2009), as an example. Here's how the related sources look (with a seemingly popular text by Waldron [2012] highlighted and previewed for the purposes of illustration):

The screenshot displays the Connected Papers interface. On the left, a list of papers is ranked by similarity to the original source, 'Extreme Speech and Democracy' (Ivan Hare, J. Weinstein, 2009). The central area features a network graph where nodes represent papers, connected by lines indicating citations or similarity. The size of the nodes varies, and their color represents the year of publication, with a color scale at the bottom ranging from 1985 (light blue) to 2015 (dark blue). On the right, a preview of the abstract for 'The Harm in Hate Speech' by J. Waldron (2012) is shown. Green arrows and boxes highlight key features: the original source, the list of related papers, the network graph, and the abstract preview.

Original source

Preview of abstract for selected paper

Related papers ranked by similarity to original

Map of papers organised by similarity, citations and year

Original source: Extreme Speech and Democracy, Ivan Hare, J. Weinstein, 2009

Related papers ranked by similarity to original:

- The Content and Context of Hate Speech: Rethinking Regulation and Responses, M. Herz, P. Molnár, 2012
- The Harm in Hate Speech, J. Waldron, 2012
- Viewpoint Absolutism and Hate Speech, Eric Heinze, 2006
- Religion and Freedom of Speech: Portraits of Muhammad, R. Post, 2007
- The Harm in Hate Speech, R. Delgado, 2013
- Racist Speech, Democracy, and the First Amendment, R. Post, 1991
- Hate Speech and Democratic Citizenship, Eric Heinze, 2016
- Hate Speech Law: A Philosophical Examination, A. Brown, 2015
- A Survey and Critical Analysis of Council of Europe Strategies for Countering 'Hate Speech', T. McGonagle, 2012

Map of papers organised by similarity, citations and year: The graph shows a central node for 'Extreme Speech and Democracy' (2009) connected to various other papers. The size of the nodes indicates their popularity, and the color indicates the year of publication. A color scale at the bottom ranges from 1985 (light blue) to 2015 (dark blue).

Preview of abstract for selected paper: The Harm in Hate Speech, J. Waldron, 2012. 177 Citations, 0 References. Open in: [Icons for PDF, HTML, etc.] Build a graph

Every liberal democracy has laws or codes against hate speech - except the United States. For constitutionalists, regulation of hate speech violates the First Amendment and damages a free society. Against this absolutist view, Jeremy Waldron argues powerfully that hate speech should be regulated as part of our commitment to human dignity and to inclusion and respect for members of vulnerable minorities. Causing offense - by depicting a religious leader as a terrorist in a newspaper cartoon, for example - is not the same as launching a libelous attack on a group's dignity, according to Waldron, and it lies outside the reach of law. But defamation of a minority group, through hate speech, undermines a public good that can and should be protected: the basic assurance of inclusion in society for all members. A social environment polluted by anti-gay leaflets, Nazi banners, and burning crosses sends an implicit message to the targets of such hatred: your security is uncertain and you can expect to face humiliation and discrimination when you leave your home. Free-speech advocates boast of despising what racists say but defending to the death their right to say it. Waldron finds this emphasis on intellectual resilience misguided and points instead to the threat hate speech poses to the lives, dignity, and reputations of minority members. Finding support for his view among philosophers of the Enlightenment, Waldron asks us to move beyond knee-jerk American exceptionalism in our debates over the proper consequences of hateful speech.

TIP

As with the use and perils of hyperlinks, always keep a record of what you have searched for/skimmed so you don't get lost in a 'vortex' of links and connections.

Skimming in practice: time and making annotations

You should aim to skim as fast as you can (as a guide, a journal article of 5000 words should be skimmed in a maximum of eight minutes). If you start labouring the process, you will end up going too deep and will lose sight of the 'bigger picture' and overall impression of the text. The key thing to remember is that at the skimming stage you are **ONLY** assessing the **RELEVANCE** of the text in relation to your **PRIORITIES**. In other words, if a quick skim of the text/hyperlinks/webpages/PDFs does not reveal material to be immediately applicable to your assignment or gaining specific information/knowledge, you need to move on to another text that does. This will help you avoid wasting valuable time that could be more usefully deployed reading something more productive.

During skimming you should start to annotate the text using a highlighter pen or Post-it notes (highlighting and notes are also available in software such as OneNote) to draw your attention back to the relevant sections and paragraphs. By doing so you can easily return to them later, either to scan for specific information, or to close read in order to understand and analyse the author's ideas, argument or theory.

TIP

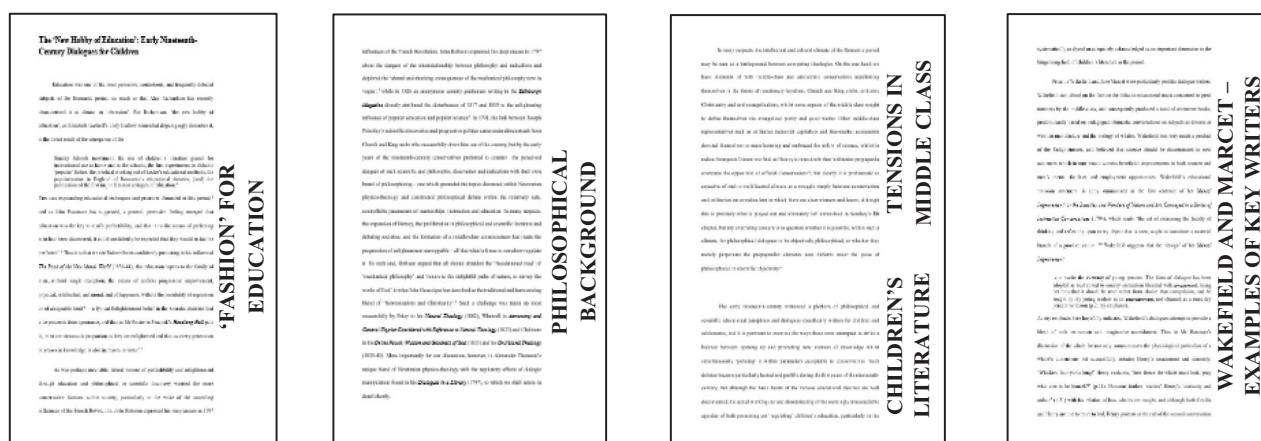
One method for enhancing comprehension, seeing its importance in relation to the 'big picture' and revising the material (perhaps in readiness for an exam or just for recalling important points), is to make a note at the side of the paragraph which reduces/summarises what the paragraph is about in just one or two words. This is essentially a clue or indicator of 'gist'. It will jog your memory when you return to it later and helps you identify and visualise the 'big picture' and any connections, especially if you are using the scroll/text-mapping technique outlined below.

Creating a scroll

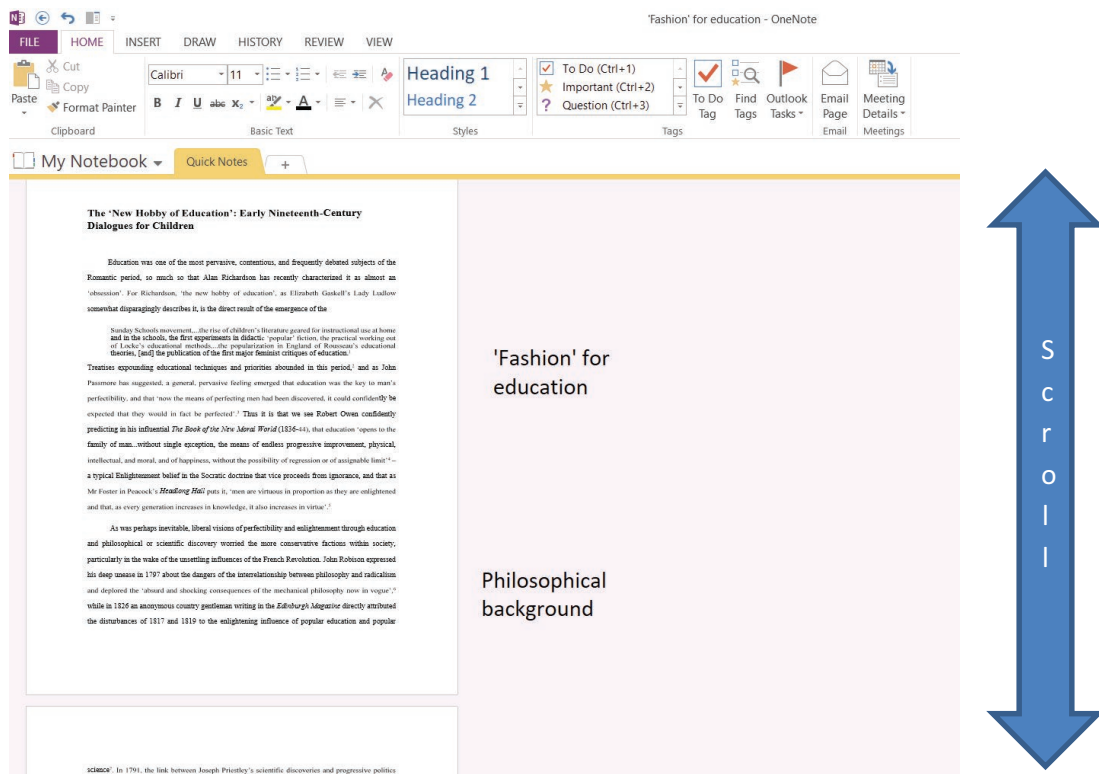
If you can print out the material (individual chapters and journal articles are only really suitable for this) or download the document into OneNote, one method of skimming in order to see the 'big picture' is to produce a scroll. This is also known as 'text-mapping' and was devised by R. David Middlebrook (2015). A scroll is an effective way of skimming backwards and forwards across a text so as to get an immediate, overall impression, especially when you have marked up the text with your own very brief notes. The way to produce a scroll is to:

- 1) Print the article/chapter out on single-sided paper.
- 2) Make notes on the text/highlight the main paragraphs, ideas or sections of relevance. These notes can often be one-word descriptions such as 'introduction', 'background', 'data', 'theory' or 'benefits of consumerism'. You can add to these brief evaluations such as 'useful', 'not useful', 'maybe useful', depending on what works best for you.
- 3) Lay the papers out in order and Sellotape them together.

The complete scroll or 'text-map' might look something like this:



Printing out allows you to skim both up and down, and left to right, but if you prefer to ‘scroll’ using your computer or device, you can also download the PDF articles into OneNote and do the same thing:



As you can see, one glance can quickly reveal the ‘big picture’ of the article/chapter, and this makes it easy to quickly find the information you want whilst setting it within the context of the overall argument. For more details about ‘text-mapping’ see www.textmapping.org/.

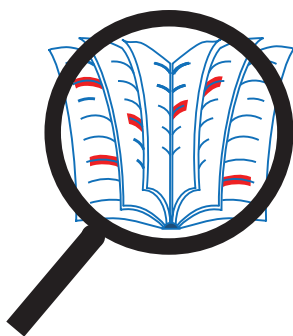
TIP



If you prefer looking at things from top to bottom rather than left to right, simply Sellotape the short edges of the papers instead of the long edges or use OneNote. Orientate the scroll in whatever way works best for you.

Once you have briefly skimmed the material and have ascertained that it is indeed worth reading in further depth, the next technique to use is scanning.

Scanning



Like skimming, the process of scanning a text is quick but delves into the material at a deeper level. Here you are aiming to find specific pieces of information as quickly as possible. This information is usually something you already know about (and you are looking for references to it through keywords, dates, names, data or hyperlinks). For instance, you might want to know if the author discusses a specific idea or theory, whether they refer to a specific Act of Parliament or legislation, or maybe you are looking for key phrases such as ‘credit crunch’, ‘climate change’ or ‘zone of proximal development’. A vital aid in this process is the use of a good index (possibly accompanied by the contents page). As we saw earlier, in many cases you can simply look up the keyword, author, theory or even phrase in the index, and it will list all the pages on which those terms or pieces of information occur.

This means that you can simply scan specific pages rather than entire chapters or sections, thus saving you both time and effort. Not all indexes are good (and in some cases, such as in a journal article, there might not even be one), but they can be a vital tool to use when scanning. If you are reading the

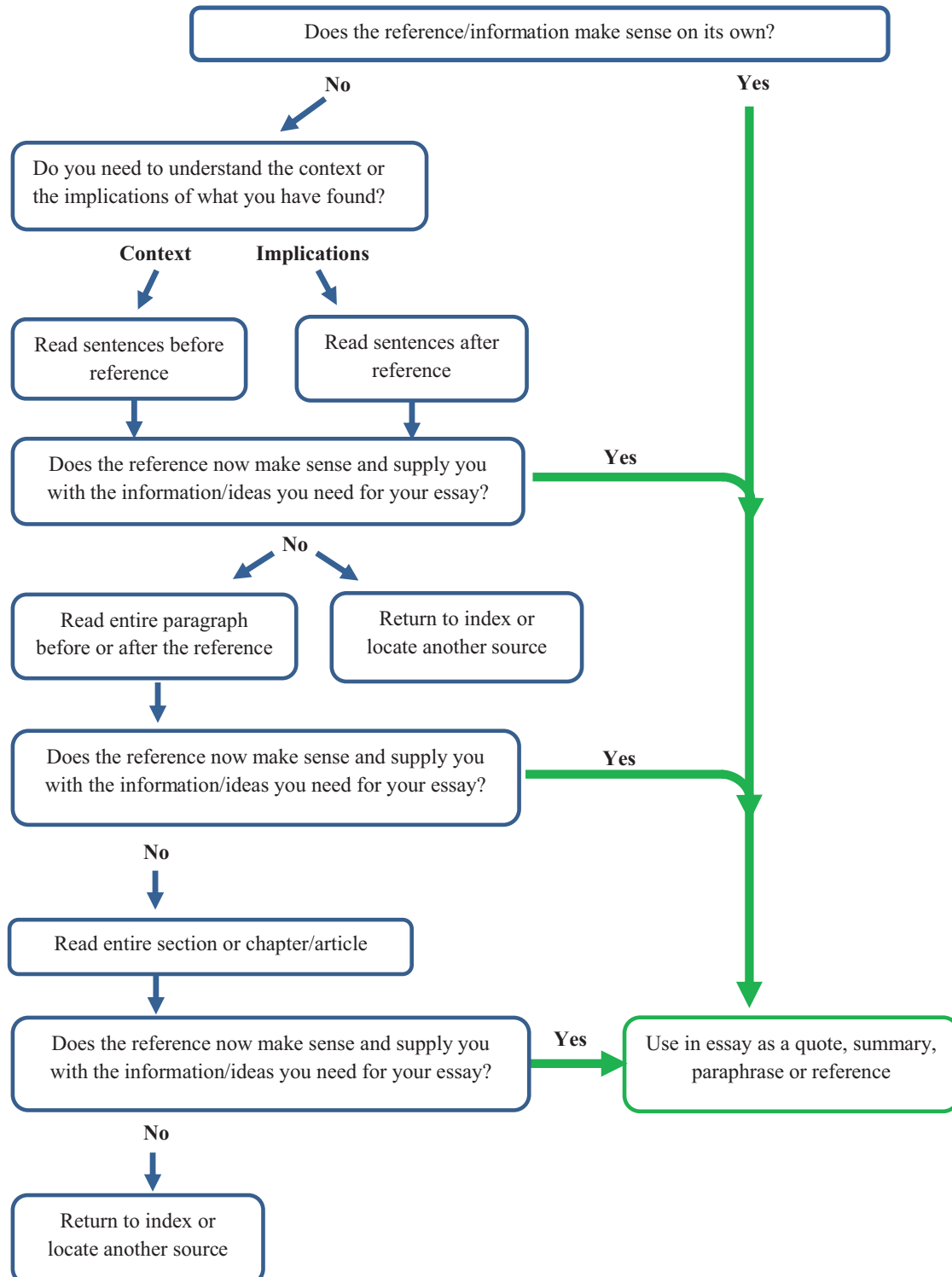
article/source as a PDF document (usually a journal article), you can search for what you are looking for using the 'search' function. This will enable you to do the work of an index, but with much less effort.

TIP



If there are lots of references to what you are looking for and they occur within a few pages of each other (e.g. 'materialism', pp. 89, 91–92, 95–97), then it's probably worth just reading the entire section rather than looking up each individual reference.

Once you have arrived at the page referenced in the index, scan up and down looking for the keyword, term, date, fact or piece of information that you need. Once found, you have several options which can be summarised like this:



On occasions when the index or word search function is unhelpful or unavailable, you might need to scan larger sections of text (possibly with the help of the contents page). To avoid larger sections of text becoming confusing (perhaps even with words jumping around), you should use coloured overlays if you find them helpful (your dyslexia diagnosis should be able to advise on which colours are best for you).

TIPS

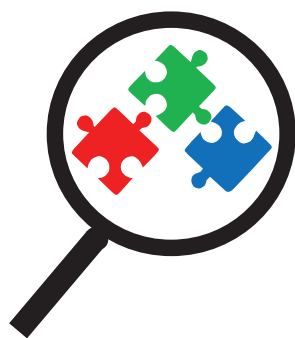


The key thing to remember is to keep scanning rather than getting bogged down in detail. When reading electronically, scrolling up and down is a very useful tactic that is not so easily done with physical texts.



One way of keeping the scanning going is to use your finger to trace the sentences. However, unlike what you may have been taught at school, **DO NOT ALLOW YOUR FINGER TO STOP MOVING**. Do not slow down – keep scanning/scrolling the pages, keep the momentum and do not start reading sentences. At this point, you are merely looking for key words, facts or phrases and nothing more.

Scanning for the ‘gist’: identifying key sites of meaning in sentences and clauses



Another aspect of scanning is to quickly look through paragraphs and sentences, to understand the ‘gist’ of what is going on. To do this, you need to be looking for and identifying key sites of meaning (this will again help you identify the ‘big picture’ rather than identifying, reading and decoding every word). Once you have identified the key ideas in each paragraph (via the topic sentence or by using the index), you can start looking for specific pieces of information. Begin by identifying individual sentences/clauses and where they begin and end. You should be able to spot them quite easily. The human eye uses what’s known as peripheral vision to see items on either side of the main focus. Thus we can see anywhere between 5 to 7 words at any one time. Use this ability to get a sense of the various clusters of sentences quickly. Identifying the key sites of meaning within individual sentences (particularly main clauses) entails scanning for three elements: the topic, the action

(usually in the form of a key verb or verb phrase) and specific detail (often in the form of keywords/dates/names). As we shall see in Chapter 6, subordinate clauses largely supply additional or clarifying information and can thus be glossed over at this stage. These elements, as the icon above indicates, are like jigsaw pieces. Separately, they give an indication of the meaning, but see them together (even if they are not actually slotted together) and you can immediately get a ‘gist’ of the overall picture and how it all fits together. Identifying these aspects will allow you to piece together the meaning and see how it all fits into the ‘big picture’ of the paragraph and then the chapter/article/section as a whole. Let’s take the following sentence by way of illustration:

Despite its popularity, **social media** has become an insidious, negative and highly addictive means of **disseminating** ‘fake news’.

Here we have what’s known as a complex sentence (complex as it involves the dependent/subordinate clause ‘despite its popularity’), but there are only really three elements, three pieces of the jigsaw, which are of immediate interest. ‘**Social media**’ indicates the topic, ‘**disseminating**’ is the verb phrase or action part of the sentence, and ‘**fake news**’ denotes the primary object and detail of the sentence – its key purpose and argument. In other words, the sentence follows the standard subject, verb, object (SVO) sequence, which is considered to be the cornerstone of written and spoken sentences in English, and is even thought to be the most inherently ‘obvious’ to human psychology (Diamond, 2002, p.143). So, irrespective of what type of sentence we are looking at (simple, compound, complex or compound-complex – all of which we will examine in Chapter 6), the main clauses are a means of communicating a ‘big picture’ – action – detail sequence of ideas. As such, the topic, verb (action) and detail elements of sentence structures form the sites of the keywords and meaning. Indeed, if we strip away all the words in black in the sample sentences above and below (particularly in the subordinate clauses), you can still get a good ‘gist’ of what the sentence is about, including its key argument, just by scanning for, identifying and reading three key components. Let’s have a look at some typical sentences you may encounter in your reading to see how these elements can be identified:

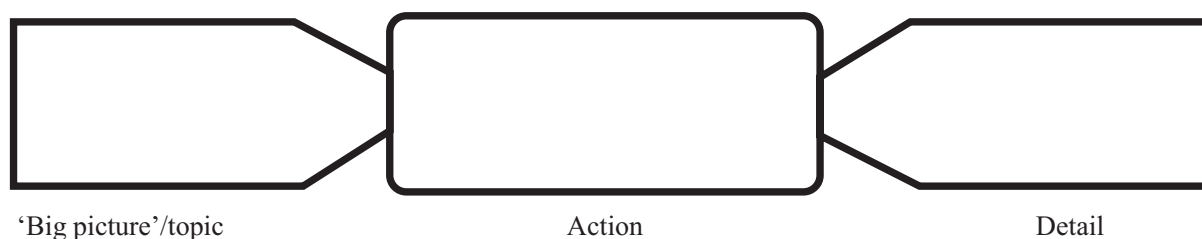
- ‘The **culture industry** as a whole has **moulded men** as a type unfailingly **reproduced in every product**’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1999, p.35).

- ‘The **unconscious** – that is to say, the ‘repressed’ – offers **no resistance** whatever to the efforts of the **treatment**’ (Freud, 2015, p.13).

In the case of compound sentences (two independent clauses), you can normally gloss over the second clause (even though it contains its own topic, verb and detail), as the first clause usually lays out the foundations and the second provides additional detail (as is often indicated by conjunctions – words such as ‘and’, ‘that’, ‘but’, ‘so’, ‘as’, ‘or’ – all of which indicate an additional level of detail or clarification). When scanning, you are only looking for the ‘gist’, so don’t worry too much about what comes after the comma – you can read this once you have identified whether it is worth looking at in further detail. For example:

- ‘The **importance of the role of the bioinformatician** as a **major player** in **modern biology** cannot be overstated, and it will only grow with the advent of next-generation sequencers and sequencing pipelines’ (Janitz, 2008, p.9).
- ‘Like most humanities scholars, **musicologists** are prone to **build interpretations** on **very small data sets** or even on single instances, and the less the evidence that has survived from the past, the stronger this tendency will be’ (Clarke and Cook, 2004, p.4).

Some reading guides recommend scanning for verbs and nouns to increase reading speed and comprehension, most notably Howard Stephen Berg’s *Super Reading Secrets* (1992). But you need to be able to find these elements in the first place. Where do nouns and verbs usually occur? How do you find them? As we shall see in Chapter 6, this is not an easy task for individuals with dyslexia since grammar rules are often too abstract to be easily understood. What is more, on their own grammatical principles do not allow you to *see* how the individual elements fit into the ‘bigger picture’ of the sentence. The word ‘see’ here is used very deliberately, because an understanding of grammar, even if you are lucky enough to have grasped it, does not allow us to visualise the ‘big picture’ of the sentence and thus the units/key sites of meaning. Again, as we shall see in Chapter 6, this is where it is beneficial to conceive of the basic structure of sentences, and main clauses in particular, as like a Christmas Cracker:



When reading, then, visualise each sentence as a Christmas Cracker and look for the ‘big picture’ – action – detail sequence. Focus on these three elements as a means of locating the most valuable information (usually nouns and verbs) quickly. Once you have done that, you are ready to make the next step and critically evaluate the material, which is the focus of the next chapter.

Maintaining focus and concentration

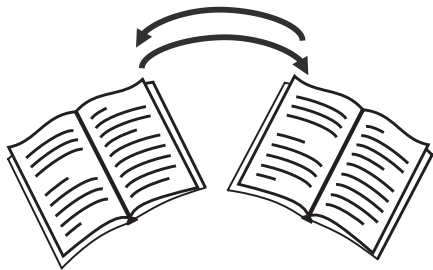
Many students feel that they need to spend long periods reading without taking regular breaks. However, studies have suggested that concentration declines markedly after 10–15 minutes, whilst recent research has rather controversially suggested that human beings have an attention span which barely rivals that of a goldfish (Wilson and Korn, 2007, Gausby, 2015). Another study has found that attention spans wax and wane during lectures, with attention lapses occurring most notably after 4.5–5.5 minutes, 7–9 minutes and 9–10 minutes (Bunce, Flens, and Neiles, 2010). People with dyslexia, of course, fair even worse, and it’s a well-known fact that short attention spans are a tell-tale symptom of dyslexia. If you try to concentrate for long periods, you will end up exhausted and overtired (yet another characteristic of dyslexia). It is best to have short, intense bursts of activity rather than persevering and ending up frustrated that either you have not fully understood everything, or that your mind has wandered off-course. Try the following techniques to maintain and improve your concentration:

- 1) Never read for longer than five minutes before having a quick one-minute break to ‘re-set’ your mind. If necessary, do this at the end of every paragraph (this will also help if you suffer from visual stress as it will give your eyes a rest).

- 2) Try to summarise (in one or two words) each paragraph before your break so that when you go back to it, the note will jog your memory of what you have just read.
- 3) After each break, take a few seconds to re-read the one- or two-word summaries you have written at the side of the preceding paragraphs so as to re-orientate yourself back into the 'big picture'. This also reinforces what you have learnt.
- 4) When reading online, minimise distractions (copy and paste the text into a Word/OneNote document or download the PDF version). This is because adverts and moving images can be very distracting and cause cognitive overload and visual stress (both an issue for individuals with dyslexia). Webpages frequently interrupt and unsettle your concentration via things like: 1) notifications to accept cookies, 2) adverts (especially for things you recently searched or shopped for and are unrelated to your study), 3) fly-in boxes asking for you to sign up to a newsletter, 4) feedback or chat boxes, or 5) notifications from other things you have open (e.g. email, social media, the computer needs to restart/update, a website has been blocked, virus protection updates etc.). Get the relevant information into a Word/OneNote or PDF as soon as possible to eliminate as many distractions/temptations as possible.

Using your difficulties in maintaining focus to your advantage: some advanced techniques

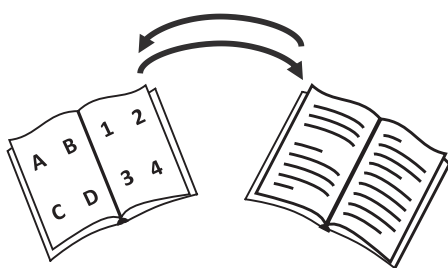
Dual reading



Individuals with dyslexia often have a short-term and/or limited working memory, which means that if you read a text for too long, you will lose focus, read on 'autopilot' (you are reading the words but you're actually just daydreaming) or give up entirely. And because individuals with dyslexia need quick, immediate, preferably visual gratification, they often get bored by persevering with one reading at a time. One way around this is to alternate between two chapters/books/articles/websites. Read a paragraph, summarise it, have a break, and then flip to another text you are working on. This might sound confusing (and perhaps it is to someone without dyslexia), but individuals with dys-

lexia, as Eide and Eide have suggested, often excel at multidimensional or 'multiframework approaches' that 'engage their ability to see interconnections' (2011, p.174), so why not give it a go? It allows you to pursue multiple interests at once, 'resets' your concentration, and it helps you sustain focus whilst also covering a lot of ground. Providing you keep in mind the 'web' of hyperlinks/webpages and avoid the perilous hyperlink vortex, reading across several webpages/hyperlinks or sources can also have the same effect.

Dual assistive reading



This is a very similar technique to that outlined above, but instead of alternating between two different academic texts, the aim here is to alternate between a textbook/study guide/introductory website and an academic text. This is a variation of a strategy that Eide and Eide accurately term 'pre-equipping', whereby students read sections of the textbook/study guide or introductory website to get an accessible, student-friendly overview or 'big picture' of the subject (2011, p.177). Here, however, you alternate these readings with more in-depth academic texts on the same topic. This will allow you to flip between 'big picture' introductions and technical/scholarly detail so

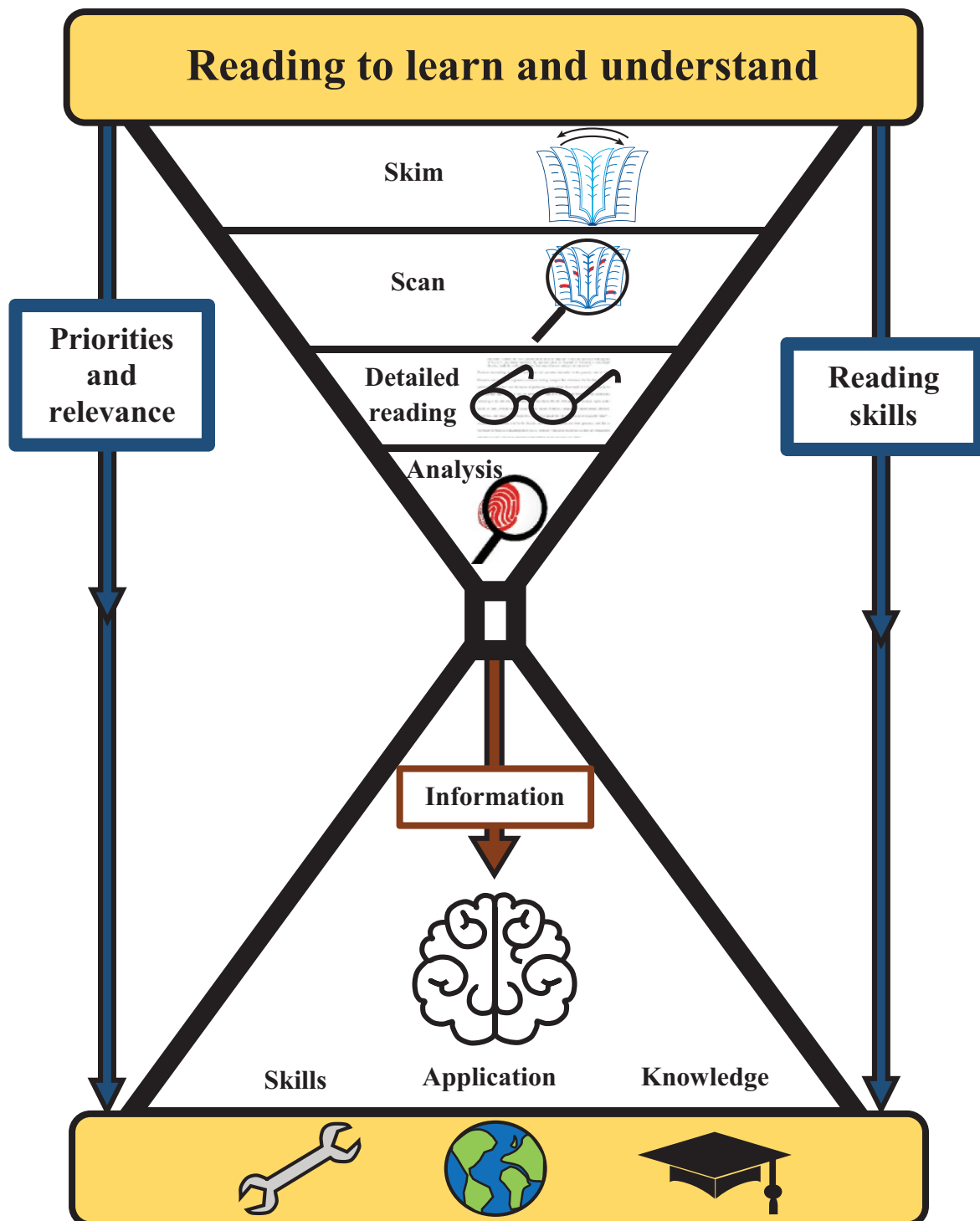
that you can situate the latter into its context more easily. Importantly, this technique also allows you to associate new information with what you already know from the textbook/study guide/introductory website. This has an important effect on reinforcing, consolidating and scaffolding learning. Again, try reading a paragraph or two, summarise it, and then flip texts/sources/webpages – don't get bogged down in reading too much from either text without flipping, or your attention will wane.

'Big picture' speed reading at university – bringing it all together

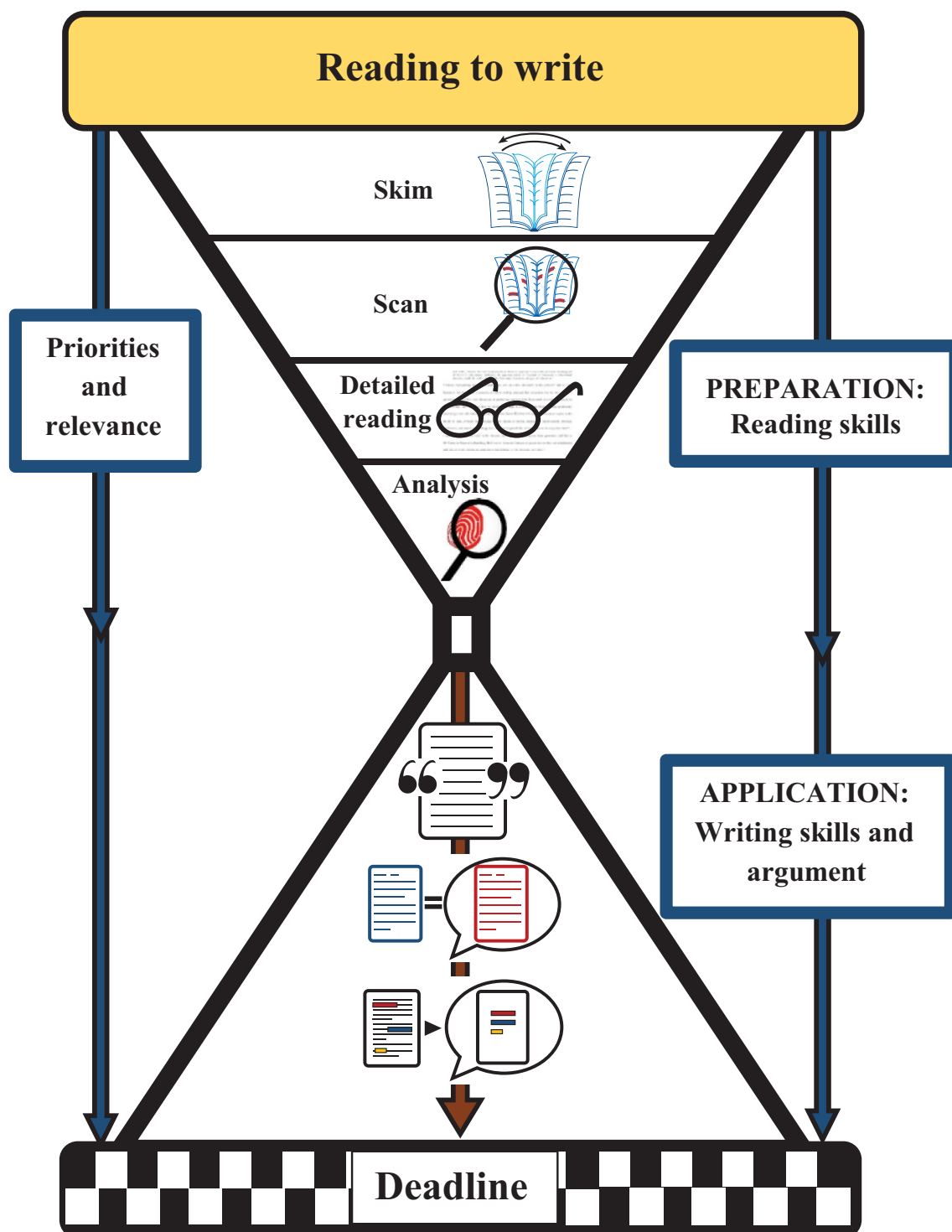
While reading to understand and reading to write remain central to why you should read at university, these purposes are governed mainly by other issues and pressures, most notably:

- 1) Time (not only in terms of deadlines but also the need to read quickly).
- 2) Relevance (how relevant is what you are reading to the purposes outlined above?).
- 3) Priorities (what needs to be read first or most urgently to address the purposes above?).

One way of bringing these competing, yet also complementary, aspects of university reading into an easily grasped process is to visualise the task of reading at university as like an old-fashioned egg timer – the shape of which indicates the depth of the reading and how it relates specifically to the pressures of time and the relevance of the material. Let's return to and examine the two purposes of reading outlined at the beginning of this chapter to see how the skills that you need to be learning and practising can be brought together as a process and mapped onto a 'big picture', visual template:



As you can see by the shape of the upper half of the egg timer, the focus gets more specific but also more skilled and time-consuming as you work through the processes of skimming and scanning. Where the information is relevant to your priorities, it leads to understanding and knowledge. This understanding and knowledge can then be applied in a wide range of contexts within your discipline and your life/employment, hence why the second half of the timer broadens back out into the 'bigger picture' and its application to the world. In the case of reading for essay writing meanwhile, the egg timer can be subdivided into preparation and application.



The process here is similar to reading to learn and understand (because without this you cannot use the source effectively in your writing), but then the second half shows how you can apply what you have learnt in your writing. Quotation (see p.102) is specific and detailed, so it appears at the top, narrow or focused point of the triangle. Meanwhile, paraphrasing and summarising (see pp.102–105) get progressively less specific and more

general in terms of the way they capture the original author's ideas and how you use them in your essays (we will look quotation, paraphrasing, summarising and their visual icons in Chapter 5). However, governing both reading frameworks is the overarching issues of time, relevance, priorities and application. Time is possibly the most crucial factor here (hence why the reading process is depicted as an egg timer), as even students without dyslexia tend to get bogged down reading detail rather than skimming and scanning. Don't waste time – set yourself short time limits to read articles and chapters to avoid reading detail – you can go back to this later once you have a sense of the relevance of the material and the 'big picture'.

TIP



Keep referring to the two diagrams above to remind yourself to stay on track with your reading. Skim and scan quickly and keep to your priorities. If what you are reading doesn't look relevant, either move on to a section that does or look at the next item on your reading list.

Summary

In the next chapter, we will consider how to subject the information you have found to scrutiny and critical analysis, but for now, practise and keep in mind the following key points – they may well save you an awful lot of time, energy and frustration:

- Read effectively, efficiently and strategically rather than trying to read everything.
- Read abstracts and contents pages first to check suitability and relevance before reading anything else – don't waste time.
- Skim and scan texts before reading in depth.
- Make use of indexes or searches to search for key terms, ideas or authors.
- Read in small doses, with plenty of breaks to 'reset' your concentration (quality is often better than quantity).
- Use online articles and guides for introductory or more accessible information (dual assistive reading), but always reference, quote or summarise academic, peer-reviewed sources to maintain academic credibility and integrity.
- Use textbooks which are laid out in a way which suits you – use them mainly as introductory guides or for revision.
- If reading online, ensure you don't get bogged down in hyperlinks – always have a 'web' map of your route through the material and how to get back safely to base without becoming overwhelmed.
- Always exercise critical thinking (see the next chapter) when researching and reading online and focus on finding **authentic, authoritative and academic** information and sources.
- Read widely as a means of familiarising yourself with the academic community and the writing conventions/styles of the subject you are studying.
- Read to learn and expand your knowledge – not just to write essays.

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