

Study Skills: Active Reading

Video transcript

In this video, we'll explore how to engage with active reading strategies to help you get the most out of your textbooks. We'll cover four key strategies:

1. **Skimming:** Quickly scanning the text to identify the main ideas of a paragraph or section.
2. **Reading backwards:** Focusing on conclusions, summaries, and questions at the end of a source to guide your reading.
3. **The Einstein approach:** As Albert Einstein once said, "If you can't explain it to a six-year-old, you don't understand it yourself." This strategy helps ensure you've fully grasped a concept.
4. **Note-taking:** Exploring different methods to organise your thoughts as you read.

Let's start with skimming.

A reading technique used to get a general idea of the content by quickly looking through the text, focusing on headings, keywords, and summaries.

As you skim, consider these questions:

- What is the main topic or purpose of the text?
- What are the key headings, subheadings, or keywords?
- Are there any important conclusions or summaries?

Take a look at this example from a Psychology textbook chapter. By skimming, we can immediately identify the topic—positive psychology. At this point, you know that the section will explain what positive psychology means. Skim through the text to find relevant information, then read the key sections in more detail to ensure full comprehension.

Next, pay close attention to headings, subheadings, and key terms. In this example, the section discusses the intersection of biology, culture, and psychology, and how these factors influence how people think, feel, and act.

Then, look for keywords, as they help you locate definitions and explanations of important terms. Lastly, always check the conclusions and summaries—they often provide a clear overview of the key points.

You know you've effectively skimmed a text when:

- You can summarise the main idea.
- You've identified key sections of the chapter.
- You know where to focus your detailed reading.

Now, let's move on to **Reading Backwards**.

Reading backwards is a strategy where you start with the end-matter of a text, such as summaries, questions, and conclusions, to identify key points and guide your focused reading of the main content. While using this strategy, ask yourself:

- What are the key takeaways or conclusions in the summary?
- What questions are posed at the end of the chapter?
- Which topics or themes are emphasised in the end-matter?

For instance, look at the conclusion of a chapter from a Social Work textbook. It outlines strategies for early-career practitioners and emphasises reflective practice, encouraging readers to make the most of their learning experience.

Textbooks often include questions at the end of chapters—highlight key words and aim to answer these questions as you read. This will help you focus on the most relevant information.

The themes or topics in the end-matter often provide an overview of the chapter's core ideas. In this example, some emerging themes include:

- Factors influencing practitioner motivation.
- How life and professional experiences shape practice.
- Strategies for early-career practitioners.

By identifying these themes first, your reading becomes more focused and purposeful.

Next, let's look at the **Einstein Approach**.

Albert Einstein famously said, "If you can't explain it to a six-year-old, you don't understand it yourself." This approach encourages simplifying complex ideas into clear, straightforward language. If you can break a concept down into simple terms, it shows that you truly understand it.

For example, imagine you need to explain a section from a Social Work textbook to a six-year-old.

(Wait 5 seconds here)

You'd use simple language to convey the main points.

(Wait 5 seconds here)

When taking notes, aim to use this "six-year-old language"—keep it clear and simple, making it easy to review later.

Finally, let's focus on **Note-taking Strategies**.

Note-taking is the practice of recording information from lectures, readings, or discussions in a structured format to enhance understanding and retention. It involves summarising key concepts, important details, and personal reflections for future reference.

Here are three note-taking methods:

1. **The Cornell Method**

Divide your page into three sections—a narrow left column for keywords and questions, a wider right column for detailed notes, and a summary section at the bottom. This method helps you relate different elements of the chapter to the overarching topic.

2. **Mind Maps:**

Mind mapping involves creating a diagram starting with a central idea, with related ideas branching out from it. These branches can further divide into sub-branches, creating a visual representation of how concepts are connected.

3. **Outlines:**

Outlining means organising information in a hierarchical structure with main points and

sub-points. Write headings for major themes or topics, then note central ideas beneath each heading. This method ensures your notes are logical and easy to follow.

To recap, in this video, we've discussed four active reading strategies to help you maximise your learning:

1. **Skimming:** Quickly identify main ideas and key sections.
2. **Reading Backwards:** Use conclusions, summaries, and questions to guide your reading.
3. **The Einstein Approach:** Simplify complex ideas to ensure full understanding.
4. **Note-taking:** Organise your ideas using structured methods.

Remember, these strategies are not mutually exclusive. You can combine them in a way that works best for you. For example, you might start by reading backwards, then skim the text to find key sections, apply the Einstein approach to simplify the language, and use the Cornell method to take notes. Adapt these strategies to suit your own learning style.

I hope you've found this video helpful.

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