Reading Strategies: Questioning

Know your purpose

The kind of text you are reading and why you are reading it will influence the approach you take to reading. For example, it may be background reading before a lecture, preparation for a tutorial discussion, or research for an essay.

Whatever your purpose for reading, note down what you already know about the topic before you begin reading. Add any questions that initially come to mind. You may find that you know more than you first thought.

Writing down your thoughts helps you to engage with the text as you read. You can refer back to your notes and ask:

- Do I still think that?
- Have I found any evidence in this text which supports my initial thoughts?
- Have I found any evidence which has made me change my opinion?

Question as you read

As you read, ask questions to help you to actively engage with the text. Maintain your focus on what you are trying to discover from the reading by keeping those questions in mind. It can also be helpful to add more questions as you become familiar with the author's ideas and arguments.
Here are some general questions to get you started.

Ask yourself…

Before you read	Question what you read	Form your own opinion
- What do I want to find out? - What do I think now? - Why do I think this?	- What is the author's basic argument? - How effectively are the author's ideas evidenced? - What would I like to ask the author? - What are the limitations or flaws in the evidence? - What examples would prove the opposite theory? - Can the theory be disproved or is it too general? - Is this convincing? Why/Why not? - What are the implications? - What are the alternatives?	- Which bits of the author's argument do I want to use/ reflect on in my essay? - How does this fit in with my own theory/beliefs? - How does it fit with the opposite theory/beliefs? - How does it fit with other relevant theory/beliefs I've come across? - Is my own theory/belief still valid? If so, why? - Am I surprised? If so, why? - Do I agree? If so, why?

Scanning

Scanning a document first gives you an idea of whether or not it is useful to you. This way, you can quickly figure out what the work contains. To scan efficiently, look at the following parts of the text. These sections identify the overall content. Note the different elements between the two formats.

BOOK	JOURNAL
• Cover • Title • Content page • Chapter headings • Tables or graphs in the body of the text	• Blurb or abstract • Section headings • Tables or graphs

Skimming

If you are still unsure what the text is about after scanning, glance through a few pages to get a sense of the content. What does it discuss and how is it discussed?

To skim a text, quickly read:

• subheadings
• words in bold, in italics or underlined
• diagrams
• an abstract, introduction or conclusion
• the first sentence of every paragraph (topic sentence)
• chapter questions (for textbooks) or chapter summaries
• discussion section and conclusion (journal articles)

Main ideas

Reading for main ideas is about identifying the key words and concepts without spending a great deal of time reading the entire work.

• Begin with skimming first, as it generally gives you an idea of words, themes and concepts that continually appear.
• Note those words down.
• Armed with key phrases and concepts, locate the areas that discuss those clearly and in detail, then read those segments so that you closely understand the main ideas. This should leave you with a decent understanding of the main points.

Other helpsheets available

• Reading and Writing Critically
• Reading Journal Articles
• The Writing Process