



Reading Scientific Texts

Reading always means understanding a text on an individual level. That is why it can be helpful to look at your reading environment and your own reading behavior.

Before reading

- **Reading place:** Find a place with enough light where you can focus well. Minimize distractions, e.g. by switching off your mobile phone (cf. Writing Center of the European University Viadrina).
- **Reading time:** Reading is intense mental work for which you should reserve sufficient time. Plan fixed periods of time for reading, but also make sure to plan breaks and relaxation (cf. *ibid.*).
- **Work equipment:** Prepare everything you need in advance to work on the text: laptop, pens, paper, highlighters, post-its, writing journal, timetables, etc. (cf. *ibid.*).
- **Overview:** What and how much do you want to read per day/ week/ semester? If necessary, set up a timetable. Stay realistic, don't take on too much and adjust your goals if necessary (cf. *ibid.*).
- **Prior knowledge:** Scientific texts are often difficult to understand. To make it easier for you to get started with your text, you could first get a rough overview of the overall topic. Encyclopedias and introductory literature can help. You can also find out more about the author. What is their interest and thematic focus? What articles have they already published (cf. *ibid.*)?
- **Reading style:** Before reading, think about what your reading goal is. Do you want to learn something, understand a topic better, familiarize yourself with a topic or write about it yourself? Depending on your goal, you can adjust your reading technique, the follow-up, and the amount of time you invest (cf. *ibid.*).

While reading

- **Reading flow:** Skim the text before reading it closely, get an overview of the structure, subheadings and recurring key concepts (cf. *ibid.*).
- **Reading roadmap:** What questions do you have regarding the text? What do you want to find out? Which sections of the text are most important to answer your questions? Determine how many sections or texts you want to have worked through in a certain period of time (cf. *ibid.*).
- **Reading carefully:** Read the text carefully and accurately. Try to understand everything. Sometimes you have to read the text several times. Mark important passages (cf. *ibid.*).

- Underline text passages only after you have read the text completely. Develop your own system for marking (e.g. continuous line = understood, wavy line = still unclear, dashed line = still to be discussed) (cf. *ibid.*).
- **Glossary:** Clarify difficult and incomprehensible terms and write down the definition, e.g. in your writing journal (cf. *ibid.*).
- **Notes in the margins** make it easier for you to read the text several times. Write down important key terms and short summaries in the margins. You can also develop your own system for marginal notes (e.g. right margin for summaries, left margin for questions about the text) (cf. *ibid.*).
- **Writing journal:** Use your text as a source of inspiration. Write down spontaneous ideas and thoughts and point out what you liked about the text and what you find critical. Formulate your own thoughts about the text (e.g. "I would like to know more about...", "What I also find interesting...") (cf. *ibid.*).

After reading

Visualizing

Write the topic of the text in the middle of a sheet of paper. Write down single thoughts, sub-topics or concepts related to the central theme in a mind-map-like way on lines starting from the center. Develop lines and sublines. Try to write down only key words and bullet points, not sentences. Visualize connections by using e.g. by arrows, circles, symbols etc. (see handout "Mind Map", website SZD) (cf. *ibid.*).

The aim is to...

- ...visualize the structure of the text.
- ...get an overview of the topic.
- ...prepare excerpting.

Excerpting

Number the parts of the text that you have read carefully. Write down a heading for each number on an extra sheet. Then summarize the section of the text in one or two sentences. Formulate the author's argument in the subjunctive and separate it from your own position. Now put the original text aside and summarize your notes in a continuous text. Give your summary an introduction and do not forget to note the context information of the text (source, type of publication, discipline, etc.) (cf. *ibid.*).

The aim is to...

- ... record your own understanding of the text.
- ... reproduce the text in your own words and thus prepare paraphrases for your own text.

(cf. *ibid.*)

Reflecting

Try to approach the text critically and collect argumentative approaches and objections (e.g. "I wonder if...", "I would object that...") (cf. *ibid.*).

The aim is to...

- ... develop and sharpen your problem awareness.
- ...criticize the text.
- ... develop arguments for your own writing task.

(cf. *ibid.*)

Communicating

Talk about what you have read: Nothing helps you understand a text better than talking about it. If the other person does not know the text, you are forced to find simple words and explanations to describe the content of the text. If the person you talk to knows the text, you can present and justify your own understanding of it (cf. *ibid.*).

The aim is to...

- ...present your own understanding of the text.
- ...put problems up for discussion.
- ...find arguments and inspiration for your writing project.

(cf. *ibid.*)

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