

READING ACADEMIC TEXTS

Reading always means to understand a text on an individual level, since the reader has to put meaning to the words. Another person is bound to understand the text a bit differently.

Before reading

Places for reading: Search for a place where you can concentrate well, where you are the least distracted (i. e. desk, library). And eliminate sources for distraction (i. e. TV, smartphone, internet). Make sure you have enough light when reading.

Time for reading: Consider reading as intensive work for which you need to reserve considerable time. Create time slots for reading but also consider times for taking breaks and relaxation (i. e. exercises to compensate the mental work).

Work tools: Have everything you need for reading a text prepared: pens, papers, markers, writing journal, time tables etc.

Overview: What and how much would you like to read a day/ a week/ during the semester? Filling out time tables can help you with that. Stay realistic, do not put too much on your plate and correct your estimated times if needed. Less is more.

Previous knowledge: It is not easy to understand academic texts. It helps to establish a context and to inform yourself before reading about i. e. the author and his/ her academic publications. Try to get a broad overview with the help of encyclopaedias and reference books. That creates an easier access point for your special text.

Style of reading: Think about why you want to read this text. Do you want to learn, understand, get deeper into the topic, write something about it? Depending on your intentions you can plan the reading and later work with your text differently and schedule your time accordingly.

While reading

Flow of reading: Scan the text before you start reading. Try to get a picture of the structure, of sub headers, of recurring key terms. With books you can also include titles, abstracts, the overall structure, introductions and chapter summaries.

Course of reading: Which questions could you ask your text? What exactly would you like to find out? Choose sections that are most important to answering your questions. Decide how many sections or texts you would like to work through in what amount of time.

Exact reading: Read the chosen text exactly. Try to understand everything. Reading a text several times (2 – 3 times) can be worth it. Highlight the most important text passages – be careful! The thing you understand best are not necessarily the most important aspects!

Highlight text passages only after you read the entire text. Developing a system can help here (i.e. complete line = understood, wavy line = still unclear, dotted line = still need discussion...).

Glossary: Clarify difficult and incomprehensible terms and write them down, i. e. in your writing journal.

Side notes make repetitive reading easier. Write down important key terms and short summaries on the side of the text. You can also organize your side notes (i. e. right margin for summaries, left margin for questions...).

Writing journal: Always use your text as a source of inspiration. Write down spontaneous ideas and thoughts and illustrate what you found interesting or boring about the text. Formulate wishes concerning the text (i.e. "I would like to know more about...", "I found it interesting that...").

After reading

Visualization

Write down the topic of your text in the centre of a sheet of paper. Add single thoughts, sub topics or terms that are connected via lines to the centre. Develop lines and sub lines. Try to only note key terms and words, no sentences. To show connections, you can use lines, circles, squares or anything you like.

The goal here is...

- to make the structure of the text visible
- to get an overview of the topic
- to prepare the excerpt

Excerpt

Enumerate the text passages that you read carefully. You can note a heading for each number on an extra sheet of paper. Additionally you summarize each section with one or two sentences. Try to replicate the argumentation of the author using the subjunctive and make your own position clear. Put the text aside. Now you can summarize your notes in a continuous text. Add an introduction to your summary. Do not forget to note the context and frame (source, kind of publication, discipline etc.).

The goal here is...

- to capture the own understanding of the text in a written form to work through the text in preparation of term papers (extracts from excerpts can be used for paraphrases in term papers)

Reflection

Try to work critically with the text and start communicating with the text and its author (i. e. "I am wondering if...", "I would object that...")!

The goal here is...

- to enhance the own awareness for problems
- to formulate criticism
- to develop arguments for the own writing purposes

Communication

Talk about what you read! Nothing is more helpful in understanding the text than talking about it. If your vis-à-vis does not know the text, you need to find easy explanations and descriptions to convey the content. If s/he knows the text, you can present your own understanding of the text and justify it.

The goal here is...

- to present the individual understanding of a text
- to present problems for discussion
- to find arguments and inspirations for the own writing project

In dependence on:

Handout Schreibzentrum der Europa-Universität Viadrina, 2016.

Concept: Writing Centre of TU Dresden, 2016.

Further information on our support services, writing advice, workshops, writing marathon, etc. on our website: www.tu-dresden.de/deinstudienerfolg/szd