

Reading and Research skills

Introduction

This guide will help you to:

- read more efficiently by targeting your reading
- improve your reading skills
- use the library catalogue more effectively
- organise your notes and sources

Targeting your reading

You don't read academic texts in the same way you read say, a novel. Academic texts are not meant to be read from beginning to end. Instead, they are to be dipped into - plundered for content. To do this, you need to find the content you need:

- If your source is a book, use the index.
- If it's a journal article, use the abstract and section headings.
- If it's another type, you need to *scan* it – run your eyes over it quickly, looking for a particular key word or phrase, but not trying to read it for understanding.

You will be expected to read widely on your courses. As a result, it is essential that you make your reading targeted so that you can use your time effectively.

- Look at the question before you start reading and think of possible points you could make in your assignment. You'll know something from lectures and general reading you've done. Some logical arguments will also come to mind.
- Then go to the library or access the internet to look for sources to support those initial ideas. You will find other ideas in what you're reading, and these could spark off different thoughts in your head.
- As a result, the points you started off with snowball into a longer list, and your reading is targeted and therefore much more efficient.

Reading skills

Academic texts are often quite dense and difficult to read, so once you've found relevant information you need a reading strategy. There are many, including:

- [SQ3R](#) (survey, question, read, recite, and review)
- [PQRST](#) (preview, question, read, summary, test)
- [KWL](#) table (what you **Know**, what you **Want** to know, and what you've **Learned** from reading)

You can also **skim** the content:

- Look for the structure of the information, using abstracts and headings;
- Take the first section you want to read and read the first sentences of all the paragraphs. This tells you the general subject of each paragraph;
- Then, if you decide to, read the first three paragraphs in detail. Then read the topic sentences of the next three, and continue.

Research – where do I start?

A good place to start is the reading list for your module. This will have some general texts which you can use as a starting point for your reading, and will mention other sources worth looking at.

Research – using the City Library catalogue

Another essential resource is the City Library catalogue. There is a [guide to searching the catalogue](#) from the Library itself, but here are the key points:

You can refine your searches by:

- publication date range (useful if you don't want to include older sources);
- content type (if you want to remove magazine articles, book reviews etc.);
- discipline (to keep it relevant to your subject);
- language;

Results can also be sorted by date, or relevance to the search terms.

Other tips:

- Use AND, OR and NOT (they have to be in capitals) to widen your search or focus on a particular area;

- Use double quotation marks around a term (“moral licensing”) to search for entries with that exact phrase;
- Use * as a wildcard search (e.g. econom* to search for all of economy, economic, economics).

Use the folder icon next to each search result to save a reference for that particular source. Once you have gathered all the sources you need, you can select the folder and export the references to RefWorks or EndNote, email them to yourself, or print them out.

Research – organising yourself

How organised you will have to be depends on how many sources you use, how many notes you take, and how many different assignments you work on at the same time.

If you think you’ll take a lot of notes from many different sources, consider using a program like [Evernote](#) or [OneNote](#) (bundled with Office 365), which can tag notes with assignment title, topic, key words and other information. If you plan to take fewer notes and prefer using hard copies, use colour-coded folders and wallets to separate notes from different assignments, and separate assignment work from other course notes.

Finally, problems with plagiarism often start with bad note-taking, so always note bibliographic information from the source, and always identify which notes are direct quotations and which are paraphrased.

More advice from Academic Learning Support

For further study skills advice, and information on disability and specific learning differences such as dyslexia, enrol on the Learning Success Moodle page. Log into Moodle, go to tiny.cc/learningsuccess, and scroll down to click the enrol button.

To make an appointment for one-to-one study skills support:

- go to the Learning Success reception in the Student Centre (2nd floor, Northampton Square), or
- call us on 0207 040 0246