

DR. CARRIE L. SMITH'S GUIDE ON "HOW TO READ"

Picture this scenario:

You: *I don't know why I don't do well on these assignments. It's so unfair. I do the reading, I really do!*

Me: *Well, are you REALLY doing the reading?*

You: *Are you accusing me of lying?!?!??? I really did do the –*

Me: *(cutting you off) No, no, no. What I mean is: how did you do the reading? Tell me the steps you took.*

You: *Well, I read the article and I underlined as I went along.*

This scenario has occurred countless times over the course of my teaching career. To minimize the chances of this happening, here are some tips and guidance on how to actually READ:

- (1) DO NOT start by asking yourself whether you like or dislike the reading. The point of reading is not how you feel about the reading material, but what you get out of it. So focus on the fact that your objective is to see what you can / cannot get out of the reading material.
- (2) Read in a quiet setting – do not have the television or radio on. Do not check your email every 5 seconds. Yes, I know what you're going to say: "But this is the way I study! I'm a multi-tasker!" Well, it may be the way you study, but it's not the most efficient way of doing so. Trust me, you get so much more when you actually set your mind to the task at hand and focus solely on that.



- (3) Here is the IDEAL series of steps that you should take when reading:

(a) SURVEY

Preview / browse the reading to get the main idea. Read all the headings, as well as the first few sentences after the heading. Read the chapter summary and any study questions provided (these are not always available). Read all captions of pictures,

charts, and graphs. Also, read the first few paragraphs, as well as the conclusion.

(b) REST

Walk away from the reading – yes, walk away. It’s nice to take a break and begin to digest what you already know. Go get a cup of coffee, watch 5 minutes of the *Honey Boo Boo*, hug your pets, call your mother – anything to step away for a moment.

(c) READ

This is when you come back, sit down, read the article carefully, and do your highlighting and take your notes. Do not try to highlight everything – yes, I know, we all have a tendency to do that. Try to focus on the main arguments.

(d) REPEAT STEP (b)

Maybe this time you can go run around the block.

(e) REVIEW

C’mon back and go over your highlighting and/or any notes you might have taken in STEP (c). Sit down with a sheet of paper, or index cards or whatever works best for you. Now, see if you can “map” out the author’s argument. What are the main arguments and are there any sub-arguments? How do they all connect to each other? Can you draw a “flow chart” of the author’s argument?

(f) REFLECT

Sit back in your favorite chair and think about what you’ve just read. What did you get out of the reading? What do you think was the most useful and helpful part of the reading? What did the author fail to discuss? How is this relevant to your life? Dig a little deeper – you’d be surprised how many things turn out to have some relevance!

Yes, I know this is a long and tedious process, but I have found that this is a really good method of making sure you understand what you’re reading. Be innovative and modify this to your own liking, but the moral of the lesson is that reading is hard work and requires time, effort, and attention.

(4) Test yourself on the knowledge you have acquired. Grab your roommates and see if you can tell them about what you’ve just read in 5 sentences or less. If you live alone, or your cat is sick and tired of correcting you, then see if you can answer the following questions:

- (a) What is the author’s main question? Are there any sub-questions?
- (b) What is the author’s main argument? Are there any sub-arguments?

- (c) What evidence (if any!) did the author use to back up his/her argument?
How robust is this evidence?
 - (d) Did the author make any assumptions? Are these assumptions problematic? (e.g., Did the author simply assume that you knew what he/she meant by the use of the term “family values?”)
 - (e) What else did you wish the author had included in their analysis? If you had conducted this study, what would you have done differently?
- (5) There is no shame in asking for help! Come talk to me, talk to your classmates and friends, talk to your parents etc. You’ll be amazed at how much more you learn when you sit down and brainstorm with other people. Check out the reading workshops that the Office of Learning Services offers. Find a “reading partner” or start a “reading group” with your classmates.

FINALLY, REMEMBER – READING IS FUN!