

# How to Read Difficult Material

Reading difficult material can be a matter of concentration or of simply organizing the challenge into achievable steps:

- Choose a moderate amount of material or a chapter to begin.
- Get a grasp of how the material is organized: Scan the section for titles, headings, sub-headings, and topic sentences to get its general idea; pay attention to graphs, charts, and diagrams
- If there is a summary at the end of a chapter, read it.
- Check the beginning and the end for leading questions and exercises
- Read first for what you do understand, and to determine difficulty.
- Mark what you do not understand to review later.

**As you read, practice *the look-away method*:**

- Periodically look away from the text and ask yourself a stimulus question relating to the text.
- Phrase the question positively!
- Respond, or restate, in your own words

**Make connections and associations**, but don't use this exercise to memorize - but rather understand

- **Look up words**  
Look up words whose meanings are important to your understanding of the material, but you cannot discern from the context.
- **Read to the end**  
Do not get discouraged and stop reading. Ideas can become clearer the more you read. When you finish reading, review to see what you have learned, and reread those ideas that are not clear.
- **Organize your notes by connecting ideas**  
Create an outline or concept map as a framework. Pay attention to relationships between ideas.

**Do not confine yourself to words!**

Use representations, graphics, pictures, colors, even movement to visualize and connect ideas. Use whatever techniques work to help you understand.

**At this point, if you do not understand your reading**, do not panic!

Set it aside, and read it again the next day. If necessary, repeat. This allows your brain to process the material, even while you sleep. This is referred to as *distributed reading*.

- **Re-read the section you have chosen with the framework** (outline or concept map) you have constructed in mind. Separate out what you do understand from what you do not.
- **If the reading is still a challenge**, consult with either your teacher, academic counselors, or reading specialists.