

Reading Difficult Material

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

- **Look up words.**
Look up words whose meanings are important to your understanding of the material, but you cannot discern from the context.
- **If the text is short, 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.
- **Engage with the text**
Take notes and organize your notes by connecting ideas.
Highlight important points or sections if you can—if not, take notes.
Format the notes you take into an outline or concept map.
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 by sections with your outline or concept map.**
Separate out what you do understand from what you do not.
- **If the reading is still a challenge,**
consult with a friend and see if you can figure out the reading together.

Good luck!