HUMANITIES WRITING CENTRE

Postgraduate Writing
ACADEMIC READING STRATEGIES
Reading strategies

• Readers use different reading strategies for different purposes.

• The set of reading strategies you will need to use in an academic context include:
Reading strategies

- **Scanning** – reading fast to find a specific bit of information

- **Skimming** – reading quickly to get a general idea of a paragraph or text as a whole

- **Reading for comprehension** – reading carefully, systematically and analytically to get a thorough grasp of a text

- **Critical reading** – reading slowly and attentively, while evaluating the arguments put forward by the writer
You would scan a text if you already know what you are looking for or have some knowledge on the topic on which you seek information.

For example, you would:

1. Page through a dictionary to find a specific word,
2. Run down the page of a textbook to find a particular date or fact.
Guidelines for scanning

1. Understand the organisation of the material (know the characteristics of the text genre).
2. Keep focused on what you are looking for.
3. Use whatever clues are available to speed up your search.
4. Confirm your information.
Guidelines for skimming

**Skimming** is a quick way of reading which you can follow if you do not yet know exactly what you are looking for, but want to get a general idea of the content of a text. The following guidelines should be followed for skimming:

1. Establish your goal in skimming.

2. Identify the type of source and be conscious of how it is organised.

3. Select a specific skimming strategy appropriate to the type of source and your purpose.
Scanning and skimming

Both scanning and skimming can be regarded as “pre-reading” activities. During these activities, prediction plays an important role, because it makes the actual reading easier. It also means that you are actively involved in the reading process.
Scanning and skimming

Before you begin reading any text, you should take a quick look at:

• The title
• The abstract (in the case of journal articles)
• The length
• The division into section
• The headings of subsections
• Text boxes
• Graphs
• Charts
• Layout
Scanning and skimming

• This should help you to link the overall text to what you already know about the topic.

• This background knowledge creates ‘mental boxes’ in which to categorise the new information that you will encounter.

• This will make the whole process of gathering information much easier and will make you less anxious about delving into a mass of information, and having to put an assignment together.
Comprehension reading

How to read with understanding:

• Being able to predict what a text might be about before reading is important.

• However, even when you decide to read the entire text slowly and carefully, it is important to start off with an impression of what it is about.
Comprehension reading

• The successful understanding of a text depends on one’s ability to grasp what the text is “all about”.

• The main idea is the idea that receives the most attention in a text.

• Being able to separate main ideas from sub-ideas (peripheral ideas) is helpful.

• This can be done by making summaries, studying readings for discussion and studying subject content for recall.
Critical reading

• This term has more than one meaning.

1. Readers evaluate the new information in the text against the background of what they already know, have experienced and believe in. These concepts can change a reader’s viewpoint or aid in understanding.

2. Reading with an awareness of reading strategies being used.

3. “Reading between the lines” – making inferences, but also establishing whether an author has an agenda/motive with the text.