**Reading skills and strategies :**

**An overview**

In academic contexts, you will have much to read, textbooks and academic journal articles. Although this can seem overwhelming at thirst, students can learn to cope by using various reading strategies and skills as well as trying to increase reading speed.

**Useful reading skills:**

the most effective strategy to increasing reading speed is to avoid reading everything or every word; if you only want to know whether the text is worth reading in more detail, readers need to **survey** the text by reading about the author, looking at the title, introduction, etc. if all the reader wants to know are the main ideas, then you can **skim** the text, focusing on the introduction, first sentence of paragraphs, etc. finally, if readers want to know specific information, they can **scan** or search the text for key words or phrases.

**Establishing a purpose before reading**

Knowing why you are reading will determine how you will read the text. For example, skin, scan, or careful reading as well as which parts of the text will be useful because perhaps you do not need to read all of it.

**Guessing unknown words**: Another useful skill is **guessing unknown words** in the text. If you stop to look up every word you do not know, you waste lots of time.

**Reading speed**: you cannot skim, scan, or survey everything; you will still need to read texts closely for detailed understanding opening conjunction with note taking. The average reading speed is 250 words per a minute, and the average reader reads each word individually. It is, however, possible to recognize 4 to 5 words at a time, and the key to increasing reading speed is to take in more than one individual word when you read. A simple way to do this initially is to divide the page vertically into 3 or 4 sections either by folding it or drawing lines and look only at the middle of each section. As this habit becomes more natural, you will not need to fold the page or draw lines; you may even be able to reduce the number of sections to 2 per page.

**Skimming**

**What is skimming and how to skim a text?**

In academic contexts, you will have much to read, and you will need to use various reading skills to help you read more quickly. Skimming a text is one example of such a skill.

Skimming a text means reading it quickly in order to get the main idea or gist of the text. Skimming and scanning which is another quick reading skill are often confused, but they are different. Skimming is concerned with finding general information, namely the main ideas while scanning involves looking for specific information.

**Which parts of the text should the reader look at when skimming a text?**

The reader needs to focus on the parts of the text which are more likely to contain the main ideas while ignoring the details. These include, the title (which is often the summary of the text), the first paragraph may also be helpful as this will usually be the introduction which would contain an overview of the whole text. Likewise, the first paragraph may be helpful as it may be able a conclusion and so it will often contain a summary of the main point. Readers should similarly try to read the first sentence in each paragraph as this is very often the topic sentence, and the last sentence in each paragraph which may be a concluding sentence. Also, look out for repeated words as this may give an indication of the points. Other aspects such as abstract of articles or a section heading can also help.

**Ensure to focus on the following when skimming:**

1. title, subtitle 2. abstract

3. first paragraph 4. last paragraph

6. repeated words 7. section headings

8. first sentence of each paragraph 9. last sentence of each paragraph

**Scanning**

**What is scanning and how to scan a text?**

Scanning a text is a reading skill that will help you reading a text more quickly.

Scanning a text means looking to find specific information. It is commonly used in everyday life, for example when looking up for a word in a dictionary or when finding your first name in contacts directory of your phone.

**How do you scan a text?**

Before you start scanning for information, you should try to understand how the text is organized or arranged as this will help you to locate the information more quickly. For example, when scanning a word in the dictionary, you already know that the information is arranged alphabetically. This means you can go more quickly to the part you want without having to look for everything. For this reason, skimming can be a useful skill in combination with scanning to give you a general idea of the text structure. Some headings, if there are any, can be especially useful. When scanning, you will be looking for key words or phrases. This will be especially easy if there are names because they will begin with a capital letter or if there are numbers or dates. Once you have decided on the area of the text to scan, you should run your eyes down the page in a zigzag pattern to take in as much of the text as possible. This approach makes scanning seem much more random than other speed reading skills such as skimming and survey. It is also a good idea to use your finger as you move down or back the page to focus your attention and keep back of where you are.

**The difference between searching and scanning**

Sometimes you might be looking for an idea rather than scanning for a word or phrase; in this case, you will be searching rather than scanning. Skimming the text first to help understand organization is especially important when searching for an idea. It is also useful to guess or predict the kind of answer you will find or some of the language associated with it. In this way, you still have words or phrases you can use to scan the text. As such, searching is part skimming and part scanning. For example, you are reading a text on “skin cancer” and want to find the causes. You would skim the text to understand the structure which might be a problem- solution structure. You might already know that exposure to sun light is one of the causes, so you might scan for sunlight or sun, and as you are looking for causes, you might scan for transition words such as “because” or “cause” or “reason”.

**Survey**

**Surveying a text is another important and useful skill which can help you read quickly.**

**What is surveying?**

Literally, to survey is to take a broad at something such as a piece of land to see what the main features are or how valuable it is. Surveying a text is similar in meaning to this; it I a broad look, at the text, focusing on the general aspects rather than details with a main purpose being to decide on the value of the text and to determine whether it is worth reading closely. If it is, you can proceed to read in an appropriate way such as skimming for the main points or taking notes. If it is not valuable then discard it. There are too many texts available, and you will not have time to read them all.

**What parts of the text should readers look at?**

As surveying looks at the general aspects of the text, it is similar to skimming, and you will need to pay attention to some of the main features of the text. For example, the title and introduction in order to understand the gist and assess whether the text is relevant. In addition, however, you will need to consider other aspects such as who the author is; is the writer an expert, and when it was written, is it recent, in order to decide if it is a credible source. There are examples of critical reading skills which are used in evaluating a text. Other aspects such as in form of graphics such as charts or diagrams may also be useful. In short, when surveying a text, the following would be important although you should know that not all texts contain all these:

* Details about the author
* Date of publication
* Title and subtitle
* Abstract
* Introduction
* Conclusion
* Subheading
* And graphics such as charts, diagrams, and so on

Note that when surveying a text, unlike when skimming; it is not necessary to read the first and last lines of each paragraph especially longer texts. This will take too much time and does not meet the purpose; you only need a very general understanding of the main ideas in order to assess relevance.

**Different types of purpose**

Academic reading differs from reading for pleasure. You will often not read every word if you are reading for a specific purpose rather than enjoyment. Purpose defines the way you read.

**Types of purpose:**

Everyday reading such as reading a novel or magazine is usually done for pleasure. Academic reading is usually quite different from this. When reading academic texts, your general purpose is likely to be one of the following:

1. To get information such as facts…

2. To understand ideas and theories

3. To understand the author’s viewpoint

4. or to support your own viewpoint

Many of the texts you read will have been recommended by your course tutor and you will need to read them all to complete assignments such as essays or reports, to take part in academic discussions, or to help you give a presentation.

**How does purpose affect your reading?**

How you approach the reading will depend on your specific purpose. For example, if you need to list the causes of global warming in an essay you are writing, you will look for texts on global warming, and you will likely find many texts, not all of which may be suitable. So at a first instance, you will survey the text to decide which ones to read more closely. Having identified suitable texts, you will then skim through each one to find which parts, if any, mention the causes. As your task is simply to list or outline causes, you will not need any detail as only skimming the text for the main points should be enough. In this way, you can read 20 short texts in a fairly short amount of time.

The process is as follows:

1. research: find possible texts related to your topic

2. survey the text to decide which ones to read more carefully

3. Skim the text to understand structure and main points

4. Depending on your purpose, you might need to further skimming, scanning for specific information or close reading for detailed understanding with note taking to record the main points.

**Guessing meaning of unknown words**

Whenever you read extended texts in English, you will come across words which you do not know. Even native speakers will not know all the words when they are reading. Your instinct is probably to look up the unfamiliar words in the dictionary. If you do this for each word, however, it will take you a great deal of time, and you may never reach the end of the text. You, therefore, need strategies for dealing with unknown words.

**Using context to guess meaning using prefixes, suffixes, and word roots**

**How to deal with unknown words?**

There are 2 questions you need to ask yourself whenever you meet an unknown word:

1) Do I need to know the meaning of the word?

If not keep reading and ignore the word. To answer this question, you need to have a clear purpose for your reading.

2) Is an approximate meaning enough?

If not, you need to look the word up in the dictionary. If the answer to both these questions is no, it means you can guess the word meaning, and then keep reading.

**Use the following to help you guess an approximate meaning:**

* Examine the immediate context of a word; i.e. is the sentence in which it appears, and the words which come before and after. Pay particular attention to lining words.
* Examine the wider context of the word: in other words, other sentences in the paragraph.
* Look at the structure of the word. In other words, prefix, suffix, and root.

**Using context**

When you give the meaning of the word from the context, you need to consider first the immediate context i.e. the word in the sentence. If this is not enough, you need to use the wider context, that is, the sentences which come before and after the one which contains the word you are guessing. Also, you may use suffixes, prefixes, and word roots