

TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR READING COMPREHENSION

“Readers are common; thinkers are rare.”

Given the academic nature of the college experience, it is always surprising to hear a college student say that they do not like to read. When asked to name the last book they read for pleasure, many college students are hard-pressed to come up with an answer. Since all college students will have large amounts of assigned reading in their courses, teaching students to read actively and to think and learn independently as they read, is of the utmost importance.

Understanding Your Reading Habits, Behaviors, and Attitude

One of our goals in FYE 101 is to help students become more aware of their academic habits, behaviors, and attitudes because they have a strong influence on academic performance.

To assess your attitude about reading, respond honestly to the following questions:

- *Do you like to read? If not, why not?
- *Are you generally motivated to begin your reading assignments?
- *Do you try to avoid reading?
- *Are you determined to persist and complete your reading assignments even if you think the content is “boring” or difficult to understand?

To assess your habits and behaviors related to reading, respond honestly to the following questions:

- *Do you get started on reading assignments right away, or do you tend to procrastinate?
- *How do you stay focused when you are reading?
- *How long do you typically read before you need to take a break?
- *Once you complete a reading assignment, do you go back over what you have read and review the material again?
- *Do you read the whole assignment in one sitting, or do you take frequent breaks?
- *Do you write and/or highlight in your textbook?
- *Do you take notes while you read?
- *Do you quiz yourself at the end of the reading?
- *Do you see if you can answer the chapter questions without looking back at the chapter?
- *Do you make note of key terms and their definitions as you read?
- *Do you make note of new vocabulary words and their definitions as you read?

If you want to be a successful student at Martin Methodist College, you will need to choose a positive attitude about reading and learning. If your attitude about reading has not been positive, now is the time to make that change. Doing so is an important step towards taking yourself and your education more seriously.

Purchasing, Renting, Borrowing, and Sharing Textbooks

Academic textbooks are expensive. They cost more because they are not mass produced like bestselling paperbacks. You are expected to combine textbook reading with class notes, to understand complex ideas gathered from multiple sources, and to incorporate them into class discussions, writing assignments, and exams. The price of purchasing textbooks is not a sufficient excuse not to read them. Your textbooks are an important part of your education, and should be considered part of your regular educational expenses.

That being said, there are some lower cost options which may decrease your expenses while still allowing you to use the assigned textbooks for all of your courses. These include renting textbooks from our bookstore or from an online service, purchasing used textbooks, borrowing a textbook from a student who has already taken the course, or splitting the cost and sharing the textbook with another student in your class. Whether these cost-saving strategies make sense for you will depend upon the length and frequency of your reading assignments, and your personal reading behaviors.

How To Effectively Approach Your Reading Assignments

Establishing your best *times and locations* is a critical first step towards the goal of deriving the most learning possible from each reading or study period. At what points in the day are you able to concentrate the best? Where can you read most effectively? At your desk? On your couch? In the library? Schedule your reading at your best available times and utilizing your best available locations every week.

Many students find it valuable to utilize this step-by-step process when reading:

1. **Break up your reading.** You have probably already begun to learn how long you can effectively read without taking a break. Some students learn best by reading for 30-45 minutes, then taking a 15 minute break before beginning to read for another 30-45 minute stretch. Other students can read for a longer period of time without needing to take a break. Do what works best for you. And if you know that you can only effectively read one subject for 45-50 minutes at a time, read a portion of a chapter and then switch to reading a different subject. You can finish the chapter later on that day, or the next day.
2. **Begin by looking at the entire reading segment.** When you sit down to read, take a few moments to skim the chapter. You will be able to see what the key themes and points are before you actually begin to read. Doing this helps get you in the proper frame of mind to learn the chapter material.
3. **Take notes as you read.** If you plan to keep your textbook once the course is over, you can make notes in the textbook itself or take notes on a separate sheet of paper. Keep these notes with your class notes for the course. As you take notes, relate what you are currently reading with what has been discussed in class, and what you learned in previous reading assignments.
4. **Take time to summarize what you have read.** At the conclusion of each reading period, take the time to summarize the reading in your own words.
5. **Create your study guide right after you finish reading.** Every class session and every reading assignment, provides an opportunity for you to add onto your study guide. Include key facts, points, charts, definitions, illustrative examples, and potential test questions answered in your own words.

- 6. Review your notes and study guides periodically between exams. Do not wait until right before the next exam, to review. Do it on a regular basis between exams.**

Additional Reading Tips and Strategies

Here are some final thoughts concerning the successful completion of your college reading assignments:

- *Allow ample time to complete each reading assignment. Be realistic about how long it takes to properly and thoroughly read a certain number of pages in each of your textbooks. Then schedule the proper amount of time for the completion of your assigned reading.**
- *Don't rush. Stay focused on what you are doing, rather than thinking about what you are going to do once your reading assignment is finished.**
- *Resist the temptation to "color" your textbooks. Highlighting every word or phrase that is underlined, or in bold or italicized type will not help you understand and learn the material.**
- *Don't read when you are tired. It's a waste of your time. Read when you are fully alert and able to concentrate.**
- *Some students find it difficult to read or study in complete silence. Listen to music while you read if it helps you to focus.**
- *Set goals for each reading and study session. For example, "read pages 56-79, take notes, develop potential test questions and answers to add to my study guide."**