Managing your readings

You're assigned a substantial amount of meaningful materials. Here are some tips on how to manage the load strategically:

- Plan your reading: engage time management practices to dedicate regular time to doing your course readings.
- Consider the best time of day, locations or environments in which to do your reading.
- Use active reading techniques (see below) so you stay attentive, and can learn and understand as you go.
- Consider reading as a form of conversation.

Reading for learning and better grades

It's important to use active or critical reading techniques when you read. Imagine that you're engaging authors in a dialogue by examining and assessing their arguments. This will help you stay alert, build your understanding of the content as you go and retain the information longer.

A popular method includes surveying the reading before diving in, then pursuing the reading with a question in mind. This is followed by checking in that you're remembering and understanding the work. This method is often called “SQ3R” or “SQ4R.” Consider the Rs a range of options for growing familiar with the material in an active and meaningful way. At first, this method may seem more time-consuming than simply reading the text, but you'll be reading, taking notes, and studying in a single process. See the steps for this method below.

Survey

- The aim is to build a roadmap of the information: what is the overarching theme?
- Read the title and sub-titles of the chapter or reading.
- Look at the illustrations, diagrams and graphs.
- Read the summary, synopsis or abstract if there is one.
- Glance at the key words, questions for consideration and problem sets.

Question

- While surveying, ask questions as you go to help with concentration and understanding. An easy way to do this is to turn subheadings into questions
  - For example, in a first year Psychology text, a chapter on stress has a subheading called “The benefits of talking about trauma.” You might turn this subheading into the question: “What are the benefits of talking about trauma?”
  - You could also think of other questions you want answered:
    - What do you already know about this?
    - How does this relate to the rest of the course material?
    - What does the author want you to believe?
    - What evidence or reasoning do they provide to support their argument?
    - What are some possible limitations of the author’s argument?
What are potential obvious biases that the author is exhibiting? Think about socio-cultural considerations including gender, ethnicity, and class. Ask: whose voice/perspective/worldview is dominant in this text? Whose is left out?

What questions has the author left unaddressed?

What parts of the author’s argument do you agree with?

What are the applications of this knowledge?

Why does this matter? To you? To your field? To the community or society at large?

Read

- Read the material, section-by-section, actively looking for the answers to your questions.
- Once you’ve found your answer, you may want to highlight or underline it in the textbook.

Respond

- Annotate the text as you read.
- You can note key words, jotting down further questions that arise during the reading or any thoughts or observations you have as you read. These are called response notes.
- You may want to make brief summary notes.
- To deepen your understanding and use critical thinking methods, think about what you’re learning and connect the information to previous knowledge in the course or in other courses.

Recall or recite

- As you read each section, check that you can recall what you read as you go along. This is commonly suggested as a way to check that you understand the material, can respond to it and remember it. This leverages the value of repetition in memory.
- You can do this by covering up a section and seeing what you can remember by saying it aloud. You may find that other methods like writing notes help you with this recall.
- To check that you understand the material and have given it deep thought, synthesize and summarize what you remember in your own words.

Review

- When you have finished a reading session go back over the material you highlighted or took note of, any key words you identified and your thoughts, questions or other notes.
- Anticipate how you might need to use this knowledge in the future: will you be tested on it? Will you have to write an essay about it? Prepare a focused care package.
- Review these again as the course progresses, in order to deepen your understanding and enhance your ability to remember the material.

Visit asc.utoronto.ca for more information on our programs, workshops/events, peer support and how to make an appointment.