



What is Active Reading?



As an active reader, you should ask questions of the text at different stages of the reading process: pre-reading, during-reading, and after-reading. Out of this question-asking process, you will develop your own point of view on the material – a key to being a successful student.

Pre-reading questions

Before you read an article, a chapter or a whole book,

- note down questions to preview and predict.
- study the bold headings and subheadings to spark off questions in your mind.
- read the introduction, the headings, and the concluding paragraphs before formulating your pre-reading questions.

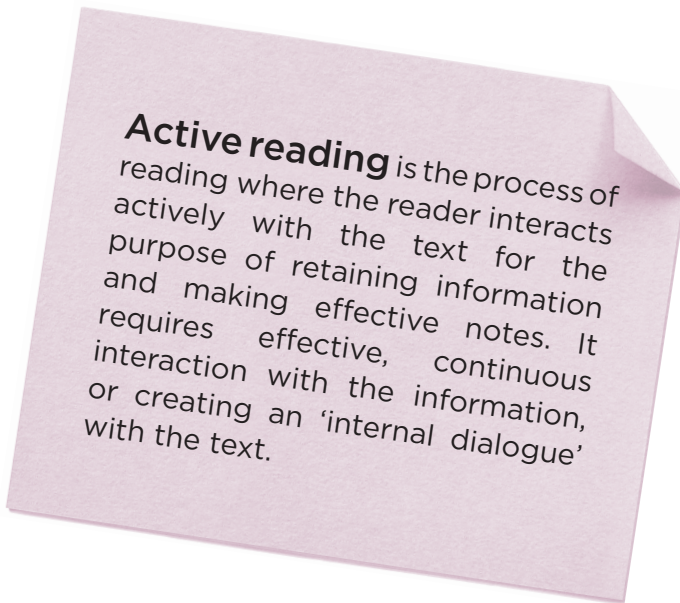
Examples of pre-reading questions:

1. Why am I reading this article?
2. What exactly do I want to find out?
3. What do I know already about this topic? Will the text 'fill the gaps for me'?
4. Is this the most appropriate text for my purpose? If so, why?

During-reading questions

When you start reading,

- keep your questions in mind.
- read carefully, breaking up your reading into small sections, looking for main ideas.
- look for the answers to your questions and note down the questions the author raises.
- ask yourself what type of information you need, as question types fall into e categories: *literal*, *inferential* and *critical*.



Having a purpose for reading is another way of saying that you have set goals for your reading. Without setting goals, you are really saying that everything you read has the same value and that you want to learn it all in the same depth and in the same detail. As an active reader, you can interact with the text effectively by doing the following:

1. asking yourself questions before, during and after reading
2. relating new ideas to old ones; concepts to everyday experience; and evidence to conclusions
3. responding to the text, and
4. recognizing features of academic writing.

Examples of during-reading questions:

Question type	Example
1 Literal	Who was responsible for the fight?
2 Inferential	Whose arguments are stronger?
3 Critical	Has the author presented convincing evidence?

After-reading questions

After you read the text and have answered your pre-reading questions,

- step back from the details of the text and make some assessments.
- go back over all the questions to see if you can still answer them. If not, look back and refresh your memory.

Examples of after-reading questions:

1. Have I fully understood the material?
2. In what way do I agree with the point of view (argument/conclusions) of the author?
3. How have my views changed as a result of reading this material?



When you are asking questions as you read, you are at the same time relating two things in your mind. You are, for example, making connections between knowledge you already have, and the new knowledge gained from reading. Then you fit this new knowledge into an existing framework in your mind, where information similar to this new knowledge is already stored. Sometimes you have to change or adjust the old framework, to fit or accommodate the new knowledge. Whether you're connecting new and old knowledge; concepts and everyday experience; or evidence and conclusions; the same procedure is followed.



As an active reader, you must always make a conscious effort to maintain your concentration and understanding of the text, by responding actively to it. Here are some strategies you can use to respond to a text:

Color-coding (underlining/highlighting)

- Use photocopies of important text sections if the book isn't yours!
- Code main ideas in one color and evidence, examples and subsidiary information in another color.
- Code key references and names in different colors to categorise them.
- Code author's personal opinions/views in one color and inferences (conclusions reached through reasoning) in another.
- Color coding is most effective for visual learners!

Noting key words

- Record the main headings as you read.
- Use keywords for points recorded for easy recall.
- Make a folder of keywords if the text is not yours!

Summarising

- Select only the main ideas of the text.
- Sequence the main ideas in the order they are written in the text.
- In your own words, write a summary of the main ideas, taking care not to add or take away any main ideas to, or from, the text.
- Skim through the original text again to check for accuracy of your summary.

Spotting the author's navigation aids (signals)

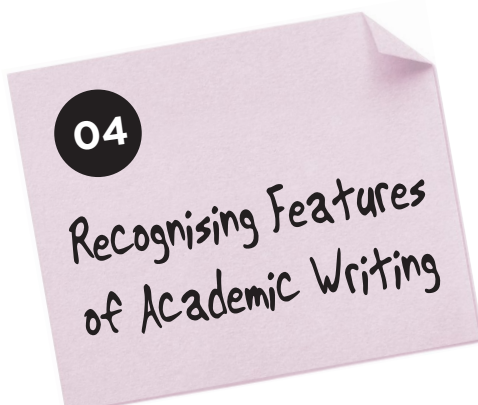
Learn to recognise the different sequence signals.

Examples:

Signals for points to follow	Explanation
1 The three advantages of tourism are...	Points to follow are the 3 advantages
2 A number of methods are available...	Points to follow are the methods.
3 There are four main reasons for...	Points to follow are the four reasons.

Examples:

Signals for a sequence of ideas	Explanation
1 One important cause of...	First sentence giving the 1st cause
2 Another important factor is...	Second sentence giving 2nd cause
3 The final cause of...	Last sentence giving final cause



Academic writing will become very familiar to you as you read textbooks and journals. It is a formal type of writing which gives clear descriptions and explanations and develops ideas and arguments carefully, step by step. Academic writing is very

economical in its use of words. We've chosen four features of academic writing which you can expect to come across: *listing, definitions, generalisations supported by specifics and statements about causes and effects.*

Listing/Enumeration

This is a common feature of academic writing. Writers often mention the actual number of items in a list they are about to give, so that the reader can look out for them.

Example of listing:

1. *Two of the consistently observed patterns of the behaviour of matter are now summarised in two laws of chemical combination: 1) the law of conservation of mass, and 2) the law of definite proportions (Brady: 1981)*

Definitions

A second common feature of academic writing is the use of definitions, so it is important to recognise definitions and to mark important ones for learning. A good way to define something is to say first to what class or broad grouping it belongs and then how it differs from others in its class. The three main parts of definitions are:

- the word to be defined;
- its general class; and;
- features that distinguish it from other members in that class.

Example of definitions:

1. Word to be defined	<i>hammer</i>
2. General class	<i>tool</i>
3. Distinguishing features	<i>Used for pounding nails into wood</i>
4. Definition	<i>A hammer is a tool for pounding nails into wood.</i>

A hammer is a tool. But the word 'drill' also belongs to the class 'tool' as other tools. The distinguishing features of 'hammer' are what make it different from other tools.

Generalisations and specifics

Generalisations supported by specific examples/explanations are a very common feature of academic writing which you should recognise and use.

Examples	General words	Specific support
Birds' beaks are appropriately shaped for feeding.	'Birds' is the general word here.	
Sparrows and other seed-eating birds have short, stubby beaks; wrens and other insect-eaters have thin, pointed beaks; herons and other fish-hunters have long, sharp beaks for spearing their prey.		'Sparrows', 'wrens', 'herons' are specific examples of the general word 'birds'.

Causes and Effects

Another very important aspect of academic writing is the discussion of causes and effects. Consider the following sentence: *'Global warming is a direct consequence (or result) of careless human activities'*.

In the above sentence, there is a clear cause/effect relationship which is explained in the following table:

Cause	Effect/Result	Words signalling cause/effect
'careless human activities'	'global warming'	'direct consequence of' or 'result of'

Here are some more signals of cause/effect relationships:

- Because
- As a result of
- Due to
- Consequently
- Cause
- Result in
- Trigger(ed)
- Gave rise to
- Repercussions
- It follows that
- Leads to
- Brought about, etc.



Activity: Active Reading Practice

- a Write pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading questions for the text below.
- b Draw connections between your real life experiences and the text, and
- c Identify features of academic writing found in the article.

LOST MEMORIES: TWO TYPES OF AMNESIA

There are two common things that happen to people with head injuries: 1) retrograde and 2) anterior grade amnesia. Amnesia means you lost a memory that you once had as a result of injuries to your brain. It's as if someone has erased part of your past. Retrograde amnesia means you have lost memories for events PRIOR to the accident. For some people, retrograde amnesia can cover just a minute or even a few seconds. In other words, they'll recall the car coming right at them but are unable to recall the moment of impact. For other people, retrograde amnesia may affect longer periods of time. The last three or four hours prior to the accident are gone. As people get better from their head injuries, long-term memories tend to return. However, memories tend to return like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle; these bits and pieces return in random order. In general, the smaller the degree of retrograde amnesia, the less significant the head injury.

Another form of memory loss is called anterior grade amnesia. In this case, events FOLLOWING the accident have been erased. A good part of that is due to the brain injury itself. Complex systems in the brain are injured, and the chemical balance in the brain is upset. As brain chemistry normalizes and brain systems begin working, memory also starts to work. Patients with anterior grade amnesia can spend several months in the hospital but are only able to recall the last to two to three weeks of their stay.

(Johnson: 1988)



Answers

Question (a)

Pre-reading questions (these are sample answers only)

- 3. How has my outlook on memory and amnesia changed after this reading?
- 2. Where exactly do I agree with the point of view of the author?
- 1. Do I fully understand the reading?

Post-reading questions

- 3. Are his explanations valid? (inferential)
- 2. Is the author convincing? (critical)
- 1. What triggers the occurrence of the two types of amnesia? (literal)

During reading questions (sample answers only)

- 1. What do I need to know about the two types of memory?
- 2. Why do I need this information?
- 3. What prior knowledge do I have on this topic?
- 4. Is this the best text for my purpose?

Question (b)

Connections between my prior knowledge and the text.

- ← Retrograde amnesia is somewhat similar to a passing moment of forgetfulness.
- ← I might know some people who have actually lost their memory and may fall into 1 or both of the amnesia categories above.

Question (c)

Features of academic writing found in the reading.

- ← Amnesia means you lost a memory that you once had as a result of injuries to your brain. Retrograde amnesia means you have lost memories for events PRIOR to the accident. Anterior grade amnesia - events FOLLOWING the accident have been erased.

Definitions

- ← two common things: 1) retrograde amnesia and 2) anterior grade amnesia; Another form of memory loss...

Listing

- ← **As** brain chemistry normalizes and brain systems begin working, memory also starts to work.
 - ← A good part of that is **due to** the brain injury itself.
 - ← ... **the** smaller the degree of retrograde amnesia, the less significant the head injury.
 - ← **As** people get better from their head injuries, long-term memories tend to return.
 - ← ... you lost a memory that you once had as a **result of** injuries to your brain.
- Statements of cause and effects**

- ← **(specific)** The last three or four hours prior to the accident are gone.
 - ← **(generalisation)** For other people, retrograde amnesia may affect longer periods of time.
 - ← **(specific)** For some people...they'll recall the car coming right at them but are unable to recall the moment of impact.
 - ← **(generalisation)** Retrograde amnesia means you have lost memories for events PRIOR to the accident.
- Generalisations supported by specific examples**

Reference:

Johnson, G. 1998. "Memories: Two Types of Amnesia". *Traumatic Brain Injury Survival Guide*. Updated 3/04 [Online] Available at: <http://www.tbguide.com/> (Access 08/09/09)