Note-taking for Textbooks

How to read academic journals

- Most university readings involve academic journals or textbooks where reading critically is needed to truly understand and engage with the reading.
- Critical readings involve both analyzing and interpreting the information presented.
  - It additionally involves evaluating the main themes of the text and understanding how the texts created those themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Critical reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Get a grasp of the basic text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity</strong></td>
<td>Absorbing and understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>What the text says</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions</strong></td>
<td>• What is the text saying? • What info can I get from it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direction</strong></td>
<td>“With” the text – taking for granted that the text is correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
<td>Restatement and summary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How a student can prepare for academic readings

**Self-reflect**
- What are your feelings on the topic?
- What previous assumptions, knowledge do you bring to the text?
- What biases might you hold against the text? Are you able to keep an open mind?

**Aim to read to understand**
- Examine the text and its context: who is the author? When was it written?
Digital vs. Printed Textbooks

- There is often a divide over whether students prefer digital or printed textbooks.

**Advantages of printed textbooks**

- Most people have grown up with printed textbooks – feel more comfortable and familiar with this format.
- Some studies suggest reading in print allows readers to absorb more information compared to e-textbooks.
- There are typically less distractions with printed textbooks (no online alerts etc.).
- Students can always refer back to highlighting and margin notes that aren’t always available with e-textbooks only offered for limited times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of digital textbooks</th>
<th>Disadvantages of digital textbooks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have convenience in reading since it’s downloadable – content is available offline, viewable across multiple electronic devices</td>
<td>Requires the use of an electronic device (e.g., PC, laptop, tablet) to access and view the content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can contain interactive resources not found in printed educational materials (quizzes, videos etc.)</td>
<td>Greater physical and mental demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More enhanced navigational tools – find information by using hyperlinks or use the search function to find key words/phrases</td>
<td>Can experience annoyance of scrolling through digital content and difficulty moving back and forth through digital pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often cost cheaper compared to printed textbooks</td>
<td>Distracting social media alerts on the electronic device,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More portable compared to printed textbooks</td>
<td>A student’s level of comprehension can be negatively impacted when content is presented in a digital format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some e-textbooks are only available for 1 semester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Different note-taking layouts**

**What are Cornell notes?**

- Way of organizing and recording notes from textbooks

**Why should I use it?**

- Recording comments, questions, or thoughts about information from your information
- Summarizing the main ideas in your notes
- Integrating notes from lectures and textbooks or readings
- Studying your notes for tests and exams and testing your understanding
Steps:

Divide the page into three sections:

1. A large column on the right side of the page for lecture or text notes
   - Record your notes during the lecture as you normally would, and review after the class to add in any missed information
2. A smaller column on the left side of the page as the “cue” column
   - Record questions here based on the main ideas in the lecture notes
   - Test your understanding by covering the lecture notes and answering the questions in the cue column
3. A short row at the bottom of the page for a summary of the notes on that page

Tips for textbook readings:

Try this next time you’re completing a reading.
- Multiply the number of pages you need to read by 5 minutes – this is roughly how much time you should set aside for yourself
- Divide the reading into about 10-page chunks
- Have your supplies ready depending on your preference (highlighters, pens, notebook, notecards, sticky notes etc.)
- When using coloured pens/highlighters – only be highlighting 15-25% of the text (The idea is that you could re-read JUST the highlighted portion in a month and get the gist of the paragraph without having to re-read the whole paragraph)
- If something isn’t making sense try reading it aloud and make sure you’re writing your notes in your own words – this can help process the information in a new way.

P2R System:

Preview

First read over section titles, first sentences of paragraphs, any diagrams/graphs to get a general sense of the 10-page chunk you’re working on.

Read actively

Do not take notes/highlight as you need this will actually work to interrupt your understanding of the reading.
- Instead try to read at least 1 paragraph/section before taking any notes.
- Only highlight a phrase or two that are important for future reference.
- An important tip for self-testing is to write yourself questions in the margin to go back to later to answer without looking at your notes.

Review

- At the end of each 10-page chunk, in your own words write a summary about what you just read.
- At this time you can write down any broad observations or connections you’ve made.
- Try answering the questions in the margins you set out for yourself.
Different tools for notetaking:

OneNote

- It is a free tool students can use across multiple devices to store and organize notes seamlessly.
- Offers the feature to organize notes into notebooks, sections and pages.
- Have the ability to annotate reading documents with keyboard, stylus or finger.
- Can incorporate a variety of media including audio notes, videos and photos.
- Can use tags to keep track of important material, to do’s and more.

Cornell notes template

- Print these templates to try out the Cornell note-taking technique outlined in the panel to the left.
- Note down any questions, main title or vocab to the left.
- Note down any definitions, answers or examples to the right.
- Keep a running summary of each reading to help refresh your memory when studying.

Goodnotes5

- Many students are now moving to taking paperless notes – this app helps keeps notes all in one place.
- It has a variety of tools beneficial to keeping organized notes including features to annotate PDF’s and other documents.

Centre for Teaching and Learning at University of Toronto Scarborough

- **Writing centre**: CTL Writing Support help with the writing process and teach techniques writers can use at every stage.
- **English language development (ELD) support**: Programs are suitable for both native and non-native English-speaking students, as we have resources designed to advance all students’ Academic English skills and unique supports for multilingual students who are learning English during their time at UTSC.

References


www.utsc.utoronto.ca/aacc   Last updated: November 2021