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.

	Reading	Critical reading
Purpose	Get a grasp of the basic text	Form judgement about how a text works
Activity	Absorbing and understanding	Analyzing, interpreting and evaluating
Focus	What the text says	What a text does and means
Questions	- What is the text saying? - What info can I get from it?	- How does the text work? How are the arguments structured? - What choices are made in the text? What patterns are created as a result of those choices? - What types of reasoning and evidence are used in the text? - What are the underlying assumptions or perspectives of the text? - What does the text mean? Does it communicate the meaning effectively? - How can I use this text to develop my own arguments?
Direction	"With" the text – taking for granted that the text is correct	"Against" the text – questioning the text's assumptions and arguments and interpreting the meaning of it in context
Response	Restatement and summary	Description, interpretation, and evaluation

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?

- Skim the text: what's the topic? Main idea? Main points?
- Resolve confusion: search any unfamiliar terms, reread any unclear paragraphs.

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.

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

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.

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