All university students know how to read, but not all know how to read *for comprehension*. Proper reading is a slow and active process; it takes thinking, time, and effort. Most students, when they sit down to read an article or a book, are passive readers. They:

- **Rush the process**: After twenty minutes, most readers begin to evaluate how quickly they are progressing through the text; they begin checking the time and seeing how many pages are left to be read. They then start reading at a faster pace, knowing they need to finish the text but don’t have all day to do it.

- **Focus too heavily on the minor points**: Students often take a long time reading a text, not because they are slow readers but because they get bogged down in the details of the text. They take the time to understand a minor point, but fail to understand the author’s argument or the reason for why the minor point is made.

- **Take passive notes**: Students are passive readers when they underline, circle, star, or make any other notation of words/phrases that sound important *without knowing why they are important*. Just because a text is highlighted/underlined, etc. does not mean that you have properly read it.

**Seven Steps to Reading for Comprehension**

The trick to reading effectively is to read *actively*. This means slowing down, thinking about the overarching argument, and approaching the text from many angles. The more times you can think about the big picture of the text, most specifically, the thesis and structure of the argument, the easier it will be both to understand and to remember what you read.

**Step 1: Pre-Reading Predictions**

- Before starting to read, STOP and think about the text.
- In 1 or 2 bullet points, write what you predict will be the author’s main point. Garner clues from the title, what you know about the author, what your tutor or professor has said about the text in class, etc.

**Step 2: Sketch Outline**

- On one side of a piece of paper, identify a space for the introduction, main points, conclusion, and your analysis.
- Scan the article or chapter and identify any headings or subheadings. Place these in their appropriate places in the outline.
- The goal is to have all your notes on one side of one piece of paper. This forces you to focus on the author’s primary points, rather than getting lost in the details. The details don’t matter if you can’t identify how they relate to the main structure.
Step 3: Read the Introduction

- Identify the author’s research question, the significance of the question, the author’s thesis and the method the author will use to argue this thesis.
- This information, though sometime more explicit than other times, is usually in the introduction. If you can’t find this information in the introduction, then read the conclusion. The most important information for effective reading is in the introduction and conclusion.

Step 4: Scan and Summarise Paragraphs

- Scan the article and familiarize yourself with the language used
- Work through the article/chapter paragraph by paragraph or section by section, depending on how long the paragraphs are.
- Read the first section/few paragraphs/pages, and then stop and think about what the main point of that section is that you just read.
- Write a ‘chunk summary’ (1-2 sentences summarising the point of that section) in the outline. Always try to make your own sentences. Select key words and short phrases to make smooth and complete sentences. Sometimes you may have to write in a word or two to make the sentence complete. Generally, it is best to leave out small words like “the” or "a".
- Do this for every section/sub-section of the text. Reading and note-taking in this way will not speed up the process. It will, however, keep it from being a waste of time.

Step 5: Review the Article or Chapter

- When you have finished reading the text, you will have nearly one full page of notes.
- Instead of putting it on the shelf and moving on to something else, take the time to review what you just read
- With your notes, review the research question, the thesis, and the method.

Step 6: Analyse the Article or Chapter

- In the final section of your notes, jot down your thoughts. Where you persuaded by the argument? What are the author’s strengths/weaknesses of the argument? Where there invalid arguments? Was it developed enough? Did the author use good evidence? Did the author fairly represent those he/she was critiquing?
- These are the questions/answers you should be prepared to discuss in your tutorial!

Step 7: Review the Outline Notes the following Day, Week, Month

- One key to memorisation is the constant review of information.
- Try to review your notes throughout the semester. Doing so will transfer the information from your short term memory to long term memory, ultimately making studying for exams easier as well as ensuring that you actually learn something!

Your single pages of notes might follow this template, with the number of ‘sections’ varying with each article/chapter:
Highlighting and Underlining

In addition to taking notes on a separate sheet of paper, many students will want to underline or highlight on the text itself. Making notes on the text itself can be helpful but should not replace taking comprehensive notes on a separate page.

Basic Guidelines

- Read the entire paragraph or section (depending on the subject matter of the material) before highlighting. Decide what the main idea is and what the supporting details are.

- Highlight the right amount. Make sure your highlighting covers all the necessary material for recall on tests; but make sure you don’t highlight too much. Remember to focus on the main arguments of the text.

- Develop and use a variety of symbols for instant discrimination during review. For example, circle defined words; underline the definition; draw a margin down the side of the page for the examples or elaborate material. Use a variation of this technique for different kinds of subjects.

- Highlight and use markings consistently. Every once in a while review the type and amounts of marking in earlier chapters to ensure consistency.

- Use the margins - for writing key words, correlation with lecture notes, your own thoughts/reactions, etc.

- Remember that the main purpose of highlighting is to reduce the amount of material to be specifically remembered and thus to be reviewed. Do not get bogged down in details.