

# Effective reading



## Reading

The sort of reading we engage with at university is very different from the sort of reading we might choose at home for leisure. When we read academic texts, we are often trying to understand ideas that we have not previously encountered or that are quite complex. Therefore, as well as being able to read, we also need a way of 'engaging with' or 'getting into' the text.

One method for effective reading is **SQ3R** (Robinson, 1946). Although it may seem rather old-fashioned this method and variations of it are still used today. It may seem a clinical approach to a task which clearly involves thoughts and feelings and it may not always be appropriate. However, it can be applied to any text. SQ3R is short for: **Survey, Question, Read, Recall, and Review**.

### **Survey**

Spend a minute or two, quickly scanning the text you are going to read in order to gain an overall impression. With a text book you might want to look at the title, date of publication, contents list, summary and or introduction. With a journal article there may be an abstract which summarises the key ideas and the text may be structured using subheadings. This process may help you avoid reading texts which are not relevant to your studies.

### **Question**

Write down some questions which you expect to find answers for in the text. While this does not necessarily make texts interesting it does give reading a purpose. Do not be afraid to begin with very simple questions and move on to more complex ones as you read more and begin to understand the subject better. For example, you may begin by asking 'what do x and y mean?' and then go on to ask, 'what is the relationship between x and y?' or 'to what extent does x affect y?'

### **Read**

Read the text once without making any notes. If the text is long you may wish to break it into sections before you begin to read. As you read, keep in mind your questions and also keep asking, is the text relevant? Is the author stating facts or opinions and can I make use of this information?

### **Recall**

Most of us forget what we have read within a few minutes. Therefore it helps to stop reading after a while and try to recall the important points of a text. This activity encourages us to concentrate, helps us to remember and allows us to put ideas into our own words.

*Note: in an essay you must acknowledge your sources (i.e. use citations and references) even when you are not using direct quotations.*

### **Review**

Reviewing is about checking your notes against the text to ensure you have either recalled all the main points or recalled them accurately. It is also an opportunity to see if you can now answer any of the questions which you set yourself at the start and whether any new questions have emerged.

While this approach requires some effort on your part and may not always be appropriate or effective, it may encourage you to think more strategically about reading rather than avoiding it altogether or spending lots of time reading with no obvious benefit.