

How to focus on reading in a digital world



1. Find the right reading environment for you

- **Find a quiet space** where you can read without distraction.
- **Identify your own reading needs** and prioritise them.
- If available, **utilise accessibility features** like read aloud functions, if these help you digest information effectively.



2. Try to avoid distractions

- Utilise **'do not disturb'** functions on your devices.
- **Schedule time to read** and do your best to stick to this.
- **Set realistic targets** for your reading.



3. Take regular breaks

- **Screen fatigue is real.** Break digital reading down into smaller chunks.
- **Try to summarise** your thinking before you take a break.
- **Use tools** like Pomodoro to help with time management.



4. Be 'active in the text'

- **Plan.** Find relevant resources before you begin reading.
- **Make use of technology's functionality.** Many platforms can help you to search, engage with, and annotate resources. Find the one that works for you.
- **Annotate.** Where possible, make personal notes directly on the text to keep everything in the same place.
- **Discuss with your fellow students.** It's a great way to hear alternative viewpoints.
- **Don't take too many notes.** Be selective to develop the ability to summarise.
- **Sync devices** so that you can access your notes wherever you are.



5. Vary your reading practice

- **Adopt a critical approach to reading.** Consider the voice of the author and the perspectives they are trying to convey.
- **Speak with your tutors** about the key reading skills they'd like you to develop. Every discipline has different practices and requirements.
- **Don't just skim read.** It's a useful skill, but don't forget to dive deeper into the text too.



"I lay out my computer screen in a very specific, sectioned way, dividing it so I can see multiple things at once (dictionary, doc for note taking, browser, pdf viewer). This stops me getting distracted and keeps me focused as I never need to minimise the reading and it stays at the forefront of my mind. I always write comments as I read and set up a timer that blacklists certain websites when I need to stay focused."

(3rd year Classical Studies student, University of Lincoln)

How collaborative reading can **work for you**



1. It allows you to **develop your thinking** about a topic by working together.



2. It helps you to **access different perspectives** on the subject matter because you can see what others think and comment on or respond to them.



3. It **deepens your understanding** of the material because by writing annotations for others to read you think about the text more. It also helps you to stay focused and allows you to ask questions.



4. It enables you and your fellow students to generate a **shared bank of resources and notes** that you can return to later, for assignments or revision.



5. It can develop your **interpersonal and communication skills**, reducing feelings of isolation.



"It is particularly useful to share your thoughts because it means you are practising writing concise answers and trying to neatly summarise your thoughts. Moreover, you have something that can be challenged or developed by the other students. Again, it is useful to see what other students think because it exposes you to other ideas or thoughts that you hadn't considered."

(3rd year History student, Royal Holloway, University of London)

"Having different views and opinions always gives you a better look at something you may not have seen, and considering you are all in the same boat it's good to tackle challenges together as it makes you more confident in the work you are doing."

(2nd year Business and Management student, University of Salford)



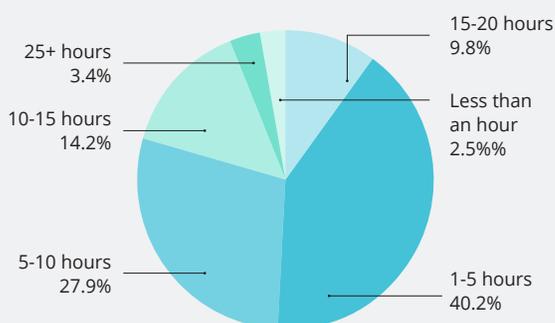
5 things students wish they'd **done differently** when reading



1. Dedicate **more time** to reading

- Schedule and prioritise time for reading during the week.
- Find a good environment for your reading where you can focus without distraction.

How much time do you dedicate to academic reading per week?



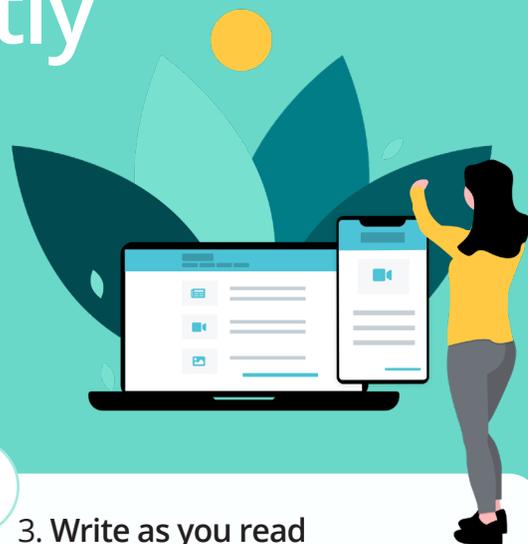
2. Go beyond the 'essential reading'

- Read around the subject and beyond required or 'essential' readings.
- Look at reading lists and bibliographies, or ask your tutors to find out what else you could read.
- Set up reading groups with your peers early in your course.
- Consider other media, such as podcasts or online videos to find out more about the topic.

"Wish I had questioned how to read and actually thought about researching techniques and learned how to read more effectively, it was never really taught - we had a module on writing history but I don't remember focusing on reading and note-taking techniques."

(Postgraduate, Humanities, UCL)

This resource is an output of Active Online Reading, a Collaborative Enhancement Project supported and funded by QAA Membership and Talis. The project is led by the University of Lincoln in partnership with UCL and the University of Nottingham. Learn more about the project here: talis.com/active-online-reading. Find out more about Collaborative Enhancement Projects on the the QAA website: qaa.ac.uk/



3. Write as you read

- Develop the habit of writing as you read.
- Identify the best mechanism to record your thinking about the reading, whether by annotating resources directly, taking notes in a separate document, or using a note-taking app.
- Don't just annotate, also summarise what you've found out when reading.
- Be selective: remember, you don't have to use everything that you've written, but some of it will likely be useful!



4. Don't be afraid to **ask for help**

- Reflect on your reading practices to think about how you might develop them.
- Seek guidance from your tutors on what is expected in your subject.
- Your library can offer a wide range of support on reading (and writing) skills and practices.



5. Collaborate

- This doesn't have to take place online - you can work on readings with your peers anywhere.
- It can also help to engage with texts using collaborative reading/annotation tools.



4 ways institutions can help students to read more effectively

Remember!
ctrl/cmd+f



1. Consider timing

- Provide support for the development of reading skills earlier in modules or programmes.
- Embed activity throughout the course of study, not just at the start.
- Timetable reading development activities rather than leaving students to take the initiative.



3. Provide alternative, accessible formats

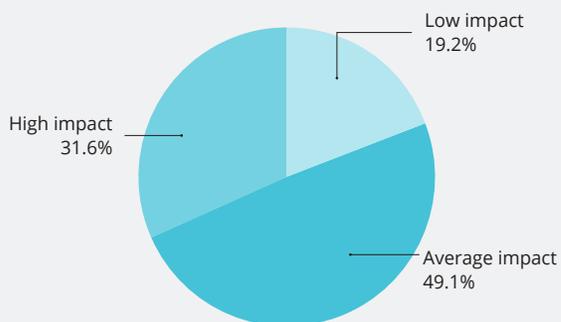
- Make students aware of the different ways of accessing texts, such as read aloud for e-books and pdfs.
- Train students in using tools to navigate digital texts, such as search functionality and altering the size or background colour of documents.
- Consider the needs of students with learning difficulties and other access needs.



2. Embed activities within curricula

- Provide both generic and discipline-level training and support - don't leave it to the library alone.

To what extent has your programme of study improved your ability to read online for your studies?



4. Provide a range of formats and resources

- Some students prefer physical texts, such as books or printouts.
- Students and staff recognise that digital resources are both more accessible and cost less, so diversifying the volume and range of digital texts has many potential benefits.
- Don't set too much reading as it can be overwhelming and off-putting.

"I think it would have been very helpful if there was a programme or module designed to help us with our own reading practices in the first year, because without that help, we often develop bad and unhealthy reading habits that lead to frustration and dissatisfaction with the practice of learning."

(2nd year History of Art student, University of Lisbon)

