

Active Reading Strategies

“Active literacy, by its very definition, requires readers to merge their thinking with the information. Annotating in the margins and jotting thinking on sticky notes gives readers a place to hold their thinking and work through it as well” (Harvey & Gouvis, 2007, p. 55).

Preview the Text

This means looking over the text before actually reading it. This strategy saves time and helps you locate the important parts of a text.

First, read the title, headings, subheadings, words in bold or italic font, abstract, and any questions at the end of the text. Notice the length and structure of the text. Ask yourself:

- What parts do I have to read closely?
- Can I skim or skip any irrelevant sections?
- What do I already know about this topic?
- Who is the author(s) and why is s/he writing the text?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What are some terms that I should know before reading?
- What are my expectations in learning this material?

Read the introduction and conclusion or findings at the end of the text. Ask yourself:

- What is the author(s) main idea?
- What is my purpose for reading this text?
- What should I be looking for as I read?

Write down any questions you have after previewing the text.

Read the Text

We are most effective as readers when we engage in a conversation or dialogue with a text and its author. Here are a few strategies to help you start and maintain that active dialogue:

- Try not to use highlighters; this can make you a passive learner and when you revisit the text, you may forget why you highlighted a section.
- Mark up the page margins with WORDS. This keeps you conscious of what you are reading and thinking about as you read as well as your purpose for reading. We are most effective as readers when we engage in a conversation or dialogue with a text and its author. Write down comments, questions, and terms in the margins to activate this conversation. Make connections to other learning as well. If an idea triggers a thought from another text, write that down. The more we participate in a text, the more we gain in learning from it.

Keep these questions in mind:

- Why did the author choose to include (or exclude) certain pieces of information?

- What is the author’s source and how reliable is the source? How do I feel about this statement or argument?
- Why am I learning this information?
- How does this text connect to my own life, class, and/or other texts I’ve read?
- Develop a symbol system to mark your thinking, questions, new ideas, comments, key phrases, or other connections (see “Text Coding” below).
- Write on sticky notes to track your thinking.
- Use “think sheets,” which are columns on notebook paper or graphic organizers to keep your ideas and notes organized.

Text Coding

Use a symbol system to save time and track your thoughts as you read. For example, write a letter or draw a symbol next to passages that stick out to you for different reasons.

- R: Reminds me of...
- T-T: Text-to-text connection (reminds you of another text)
- L: New learning
- ?: Question
- *: Key idea
- !: Surprising information
- I: Inference

Active reading is a skill that takes practice. Keep experimenting with the techniques listed above until you develop a system that works for you. Remember, the goal is to help you learn more deeply and meaningfully.

“When readers jot notes while reading, leaving tracks of their thinking, they are able to clarify confusion, record their questions, answer questions, notice the craft, and so forth” (Harvey & Gouvis, 2007, p. 56).

References

Harvey, Stephanie & Goudvis, Anne. (2007). *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension for understanding and engagement*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.