

Reading for college

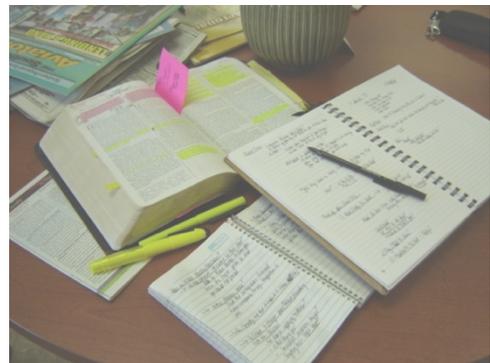
No matter what you study in college, you will need to read—a lot. Much of what you read will be information and ideas that are new to you. It is likely to be different from what you are accustomed to reading. And it will probably be harder.

Research has identified “the ability to read complex texts as a critical element for success in college.”* And Keith Hjortshoj, in *The Transition to College Writing*, asserts that “effective reading probably represents the most crucial set of skills you can acquire in college.”

When you read for college, you need a process that will allow you to fully understand the material and to work effectively with it. Here are some tips:

- **Become a “predatory reader.”** Hjortshoj says that “passive, linear reading” won’t work. What he calls “predatory reading” is the difference between “just reading” and **study reading**.
- **Read actively.** Skim analytically to determine what is most important; read the key information closely; and annotate (see below).
 - Preview by skimming the introduction, subheadings, and conclusion of the reading.
 - Textbook chapters may have summaries and review questions at the end.
 - Scholarly articles might follow the “IMRaD” format (introduction, methods/materials, results, and discussion. You won’t usually need to read all the details of the study; the discussion or “conclusions” section will be most helpful.
- **Don’t read every word.** Hjortshoj explains that effective reading often does *not* involve beginning at the beginning of a text and going straight through to the end (unless you’re reading for a literature class!). Instead, use the practice described above to find the most important information.
- **Annotate.** When you annotate a text, you “map” it; you mark it up so that you can better see what the main ideas are, how the parts fit together, and what you don’t understand. But **don’t just rely on your highlighter.** Hjortshoj says, “Notes, either in the margins or in a separate notebook, are especially important... if you make notes while you read, you will have a record of your responses to the text.”
 - Use a pen and/or pencil.
 - Underline or highlight main points and key ideas.
 - Circle or otherwise mark words you are not familiar with or sections you don’t understand.
 - Write notes in the margins.
 - Use marks in the margin (* ** ! ! ? , etc.) as a “code.”

One last note: This kind of reading might feel confusing and interruptive at first. **It will get easier—but only if you practice!**



* “Reading Key to College Success.” *Reading Today* 23.5 (2006): 3.