

Reading Strategies: Skimming and Scanning

There are many ways to read selectively to get an idea for a text. Two of these techniques are called **skimming** and **scanning**, both of which can be an important first step in approaching a dense or difficult text. Skimming or scanning first can help you retain more information as you read more closely later. They are also especially helpful tools in your preliminary research process to see if a source is a good fit for your paper. That way, you're not stuck reading ten or twenty papers in their entirety just to scrap them!

Skimming

Skimming is a strategic reading technique of reading to get the main ideas of an article that allows you to read more in less time. This can be helpful in previewing a passage to decide if it's worth reading.

How to Skim

To skim effectively, there must be a structure to get the information you need without reading every word.

1. Read the first few paragraphs in detail to get an idea of what will be discussed. Once you understand what the reading will be about, *read only the first sentence in each paragraph*
2. Decide if the rest of the paragraph is worth the read, then skim through looking for important information like dates, names, events, etc.
3. The final paragraphs contain a conclusion or summary, you should stop skimming and read in detail. Skimming is a technique to grasp the main ideas of a passage, the overall comprehension will be lower than reading in detail.

Scanning

Similar to skimming, scanning is a technique used to look for specific pieces of information in the text. This is a birds-eye approach of looking for information with the goal to locate particular facts.

How to Scan

Scanning is a method of looking for specific information or answers. Skim the passages first to decide if you might find the information you search for. To scan:

1. Search for keywords, one at a time, while jumping around the passage
2. Scan through the passages rapidly until you find the keyword you search for
3. Read the surrounding the surrounding material carefully, decide if you've found what you need

SQ3R Method

SQ3R is a reading method to increase retention and understanding, moving from smaller details to larger ideas. It can be beneficial to those who rely on written information and want to better understand.

S: Survey

Scan the text to get a general grasp of what it's about. Look for chapter titles, graphics, highlighted, bolded, or italicized words. You can read summaries or reviews of books as well.

Q: Question

Form some questions about the text and about what you might be interested in learning. What do you think this text talks about? What are you curious to understand? You can turn chapter or section titles into questions as well.

3 R: Read, Recite, Review

Read: Try to read actively and take notes about important details or questions that come up.

Recite: Re-write in your own words what you've read. How would you summarize it? How would you explain it to a friend?

Review: Re-read the most important sections, paying extra attention to passages you may not have understood on the first read. Revisit the questions you wrote down—can you answer them?

Conclusion

There are many ways to approach a text; knowing how to get a sense for its general outline before reading more closely is a valuable skill. It can help you comprehend dense or difficult texts, narrow down your research for an essay, and even find books to read for fun!