

Collegiate *Reading*: Tips for Success

Much has been written for students on the topic of improving writing skills, but few articles discuss how to become a better reader. Of course, reading and writing go hand in hand; the better you comprehend a text, the more likely it is that you will successfully put your thoughts about it onto paper. So it's important to develop both strong reading and writing skills. With that in mind, check out the following suggestions on how to improve your reading comprehension:

Annotate

Be an active reader. Instead of passively reading a text, sit with a pen or a pencil in hand. Be ready to take notes in the margins of your book about important story elements, key factual information, and significant ideas in the text. If you don't own the book, you can jot down your thoughts on Post-it Notes and stick them on the appropriate pages.

Be Aware of the Author's Writing Style

Every author writes with a purpose. So he or she deliberately uses methods to successfully relate specific information to the audience. When you're reading, look for patterns in the author's writing. For example, you may notice a repetition of key words, phrases, or symbols or the use of a distinct type of sentence structure. Authors employ these writing strategies to help readers comprehend a central argument or theme, so be sure to explore how these techniques create meaning.

Do Research

Remember when you're reading that you are never alone. The odds are that many people before you have read the assigned text, and more than likely, many people have researched it as well. Literary critics have written vast numbers of analytical and critical pieces on countless books. If you're having trouble understanding a particular text, do some research and see what knowledgeable sources have to say about it. In addition to increasing your comprehension, you'll also be showing initiative, something teachers always like to see. As a note of caution, though, always use legitimate and scholarly sources. SparkNotes and CliffsNotes don't count.

Use a Dictionary

Invest in a small dictionary, and keep it with you when you're reading. Many times, you can figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word by using context clues, but at other times, you can't. Rather than simply skipping over the words you don't know, take the time to look them up. The results will be well worth the effort. Your comprehension will increase greatly, and you'll build up your vocabulary at the same time.

Keep a List of Questions

When you're reading and feeling confused, write down any questions you have. Sometimes as you read further, your questions will be answered. If not, don't be afraid to ask for help from your teachers. That's their job. Remember, teachers give the assignments, so they've read the texts and understand them. When you have specific questions, your teachers can provide answers that will help you better understand the material.

The philosopher Sir Francis Bacon said, "Knowledge is power." Improving your reading comprehension is the key to gaining important knowledge and making the most of your education. So pick up a book ... and a pen.