Managing your readings

You're assigned a substantial amount of meaningful materials. Here are some tips on how to manage the load strategically:

- Plan your reading: engage time management practices to dedicate regular time to doing your course readings.
- Consider the best time of day, locations or environments in which to do your reading.
- Use active reading techniques (see below) so you stay attentive, and can learn and understand as you go.
- Consider reading as a form of conversation.

Reading for learning and better grades

It's important to use active or critical reading techniques when you read. Imagine that you're engaging authors in a dialogue by examining and assessing their arguments. This will help you stay alert, build your understanding of the content as you go and retain the information longer.

A popular method includes surveying the reading before diving in, then pursuing the reading with a question in mind. This is followed by checking in that you're remembering and understanding the work. This method is often called “SQ3R” or “SQ4R.” Consider the Rs a range of options for growing familiar with the material in an active and meaningful way. At first, this method may seem more time-consuming than simply reading the text, but you'll be reading, taking notes, and studying in a single process. See the steps for this method below.

Survey

- The aim is to build a roadmap of the information: what is the overarching theme?
- Read the title and sub-titles of the chapter or reading.
- Look at the illustrations, diagrams and graphs.
- Read the summary, synopsis or abstract if there is one.
- Glance at the key words, questions for consideration and problem sets.

Question

- While surveying, ask questions as you go to help with concentration and understanding. An easy way to do this is to turn subheadings into questions
  - For example, in a first year Psychology text, a chapter on stress has a subheading called “The benefits of talking about trauma.” You might turn this subheading into the question: “What are the benefits of talking about trauma?”
  - You could also think of other questions you want answered:
    - What do you already know about this?
    - How does this relate to the rest of the course material?
    - What does the author want you to believe?
    - What evidence or reasoning do they provide to support their argument?
    - What are some possible limitations of the author’s argument?
♦ What are potential obvious biases that the author is exhibiting? Think about socio-cultural considerations including gender, ethnicity, and class. Ask: whose voice/perspective/worldview is dominant in this text? Whose is left out?
♦ What questions has the author left unaddressed?
♦ What parts of the author’s argument do you agree with?
♦ What are the applications of this knowledge?
♦ Why does this matter? To you? To your field? To the community or society at large?

Read

• Read the material, section-by-section, actively looking for the answers to your questions.
• Once you’ve found your answer, you may want to highlight or underline it in the textbook.

Respond

• Annotate the text as you read.
• You can note key words, jotting down further questions that arise during the reading or any thoughts or observations you have as you read. These are called response notes.
• You may want to make brief summary notes.
• To deepen your understanding and use critical thinking methods, think about what you’re learning and connect the information to previous knowledge in the course or in other courses.

Recall or recite

• As you read each section, check that you can recall what you read as you go along. This is commonly suggested as a way to check that you understand the material, can respond to it and remember it. This leverages the value of repetition in memory.

• You can do this by covering up a section and seeing what you can remember by saying it aloud. You may find that other methods like writing notes help you with this recall.
• To check that you understand the material and have given it deep thought, synthesize and summarize what you remember in your own words.

Review

• When you have finished a reading session go back over the material you highlighted or took note of, any key words you identified and your thoughts, questions or other notes.
• Anticipate how you might need to use this knowledge in the future: will you be tested on it? Will you have to write an essay about it? Prepare a focused care package.
• Review these again as the course progresses, in order to deepen your understanding and enhance your ability to remember the material.

Visit asc.utoronto.ca for more information on our programs, workshops/events, peer support and how to make an appointment.