

## Techniques for Close Reading

Reading a text in preparation for an academic assignment or for studying for an exam can be much different than casual reading. Close reading means being an active reader—reading, rereading, annotating, and looking for connections between texts (if you are working with multiple texts).

Whether you are reading to prepare for an exam or working through research you'll later write about, the following strategies can help you read more closely:

- If possible, **read through the text once for general comprehension**. For shorter pieces, like a short story, chapter, poem, or article, perform a preemptive reading of the text followed by a closer reading. On your first read-through, pay particular attention to subject headings and topic sentences.
- **Explain the text to a friend** (or Writing Center Consultant!). As you talk through the text, make a note of parts of the text that you have difficulty explaining so that you can spend time rereading those sections.
- **Summarize the text in 3-5 sentences**. Set the text aside and write a brief summary from memory. This strategy is particularly effective for writers who will be using the text in a research paper later on. It's important that you write your summary without looking at the text so that you can be sure your summary is written in your own words.
- **Mark up the text (or use sticky notes)**. Read with a pencil or pen and highlighter in hand. Underline, circle, or highlight any key passages. Make note of any initial responses, ideas, questions, or connections in the margins or on sticky notes that you can stick close to the relevant passages. Of course, if the book isn't yours, try taking your notes on cards or on a separate sheet of paper. This is called **annotating**.
- **Make an outline of important points or events in the text**. Outside of annotating your text, you may find it prudent to take more detailed notes or to make an outline. This may take more time, but the reward is a more detailed account of your reading that will be useful later. Caution: when taking detailed reading notes, be sure that you don't copy the text word for word. Summarize the information in your own words.
- **Perform a reflective freewrite**. After you've read the text, set it aside and write whatever comes to your mind without regard to editing. This is the time to explore any questions that came up during your reading or respond to the article with your own ideas. You might also try connecting what you read to personal experiences.
- For academic articles, **make note of references to other texts that could be useful for your project**. Include the author, article or book title, and issue number (for periodicals). That way, you'll be able to quickly find new avenues for research if/as you need them, rather than having to search back through pages and pages of articles.
- **Start a reading group**. The more you read, the more efficient a close-reader you will become. Consider creating a reading group on a topic of interest, and meet weekly to discuss a common reading.

**Ready to begin writing about your text? Let the Writing Center help!**

Stop by LIB 362 or visit us online at [mtsu.mywconline.com](https://www.mtsu.edu/mywconline) to schedule an appointment.