



Create an overview of what you need to read

Always acquaint yourself with a text before you begin reading it in detail. Try to determine the genre of the text (e.g. textbook, scientific article, major work or ?) and why you have been asked to read it. Here are five methods to create an overview of a new text.

1) Use the overview elements of the text

Start by finding the overview elements of the text and use them to identify the structure and central points of the text.

- > title
- > table of contents
- > headings
- > preface
- > abstract/summary
- > back cover
- > illustrations
- > keywords in the margin
- > highlighted words
- > text boxes
- > figures, graphs, models
- > summaries
- > index

2) Read the beginning and end of each chapter

Many textbooks include paragraphs to guide the reader through the book. Typically, each chapter starts by providing an overview of key points and how the chapter relates to other chapters. Some textbooks also summarise key points at the end of each chapter.



3) Read the introduction and the conclusion

In scientific articles, the introduction and the conclusion provide a good overview of the rest of the text. The introduction presents the focus of the text and positions it in relation to other academic texts. The conclusion summarises important questions and tries to answer these based on the analyses carried out.

4) Gain a preliminary overview by writing, drawing or discussing

In general, it is always a good idea to not just read a text, but to work critically with the material you are reading. This also applies when you are creating an overview. Combine your introductory reading with other overview activities, e.g.:

- Create a mind map of your first impression of the interconnections and key points in the text
- Write briefly about your first impression of the text
- Talk to your fellow students about the key points of the text to hear what they think
- Ask your lecturer which texts/chapters are interconnected, and what the main themes are.

Other tips: Look up the topic, title, author and words

It is a good idea to start by looking up the title, author, or both, in a popular science book, a work of reference, on Google, on Wikipedia or similar. Not because you are going to use these sources, but in order to gain a first impression of the text by reading 'around' it.

If the text contains a lot of unfamiliar words (or if it is written in a foreign language), skim through the text to identify keywords and key concepts. Look them up and note down their meaning before you begin your actual reading.

Important! Keep focus on the text at hand and be aware that looking up words and terms often ends up as procrastination.

Handout based on: The Teaching and Learning Unit of Social Sciences: Akademisk Studieteknik – for studiestartere (2009) Thomas Harboe: Akademisk Læsning (2005)