

TWU Counseling Center

Intensive Reading Techniques

The Intensive Reading Technique is reading for a high degree of comprehension and retention over a long period of time. It is basically a study technique for organizing readings that will have to be understood and remembered. One may have good comprehension while reading line-by-line, but REMEMBERING is what counts. Intensive reading is not a careful, single reading, but is a method based on a variety of techniques like scanning, the surveying technique of planning your purpose, and others.

PRINCIPALS OF INTENSIVE READING

Overview, purpose, questions, reading, summarize, test, and understanding are the seven procedures that cover the method, for very effective reading for detailed comprehension and long retention.

1. **OVERVIEW:** We have two methods to obtain an overview -- surveying or skimming. Both are concerned with reading only the more important parts. With either we would start with the summary, if one existed. We would next read the headings. When headings are missing or inadequate, or where unfamiliar material demands a more complete overview, we would resort to skimming with its greater attention to topic and summary sentences, and other cues within the paragraphs. As you get an overview of a long section, you may only survey part and skim the sections that are hard to understand. From this you should get the general theme and main ideas and the important topics and questions discussed, and the major conclusions. The principle to guide you is to spend the least amount of time and effort required to secure these elements and only these elements.
2. **PLANNING PURPOSE:** Planning your purpose means to take a few seconds before you begin your reading to formalize or clearly state to yourself what you wish to get from the reading. This will give us the most useful "mental set" for getting the information we need.

WE NEED TO KNOW: What information we need, how detailed the comprehension should be; and whether the emphasis should be placed on ideas. How long we need to retain this information, sequence, specific facts, etc.

3. **QUESTIONS:** A good time to record questions is after your overview and planning purpose. The questions should be in the same sequence as they appear in the material, if possible. This does not prevent adding new questions, but it does prevent forgetting about an important question that occurs to you during the overview. Ideally, the headings can be converted into questions which will provide a suitable outline of the important information in the selection. When this is not the case, the basic interrogatives of who, what, when, why and how, frequently supply

aid in suggesting important concepts in almost all reading selections. You have to respond to learn.

4. **READING:** The most familiar technique and the heart of intensive reading is to read carefully and thoughtfully. Reading here means not only the familiar line-by-line reading, but reading that is guided by our purpose and questions. Also be sure and read the material you covered while obtaining an overview.
5. **SUMMARIZING:** An important part of summarizing is organizing the ideas and supporting points. This organizing should begin in the reading but should be finalized and expressed in the notes. Generally, each paragraph will have one or two ideas. It is important to state in your own words, aloud, the points you wish to remember. The most effective type of summarizing, which lends itself to both organizing and testing, is an outline of questions reflecting major ideas and concepts. The sub points are indented to show clearly that they are related to the main point in a supporting role. By using questions as headings, the outline can be started before reading on the basis of the overview. It allows the answers to the questions to guide the reading, rather than be automatically summarized as a few brief points. A topic that does not lend itself to the question style can be included as a statement.

There are other techniques you may use. One is underlining. However, its faults tend to outweigh its value. If you must underline, restrict yourself to clear, concise definitions or statements. Another technique is marginal notes and questions. You may (with practice and discretion) elaborate, raise questions, and relate and organize certain important concepts or points in this manner.

6. **TESTING:** The next step is testing yourself. It is vital that you recall rather than just recognize the answers. This means that you test yourself with an essay or a fill-in-the-blank type of test. This simply means you must "produce" the answer; just as you often have to in class. This testing seems to "set" or "fix" the information more firmly in your mind so that you will retain it better. Re-reading and other forms of recognition do not produce as high a level of retention. This testing may occur after paragraphs, or after sections, or at the end of the selection. The rule to follow is to deal with closely related thoughts that are not too many for you to consider at one time.
7. **UNDERSTANDING:** The end product of the steps in intensive reading is to be sure that you understand every important question. If you omit a point, or answer a question incorrectly, you should go back and review that point immediately. You may do this by reviewing your summarizing notes, or by re-reading parts of the selection that are not clear, or where the information is scattered, by scanning to locate the forgotten parts.

