Becoming a Successful College Reader

Develop a schedule for yourself

Make sure you give yourself plenty of time to read each assigned reading. Think of your first reading as you would a first draft of writing – initial readings can be pretty “rough” and often need some revision. Also, try to prioritize your reading if you have a lot to do in one night. Read the more difficult material first, leaving shorter or less challenging readings for later in the evening when you may be more tired.

Space your reading assignments out

Many college students make the mistake of cramming all of their reading into the week or two before exams or mid-terms. This process is rarely successful and results in unnecessary stress and anxiety. Instead, get into the habit of reading something for each class each day. This way you will avoid cramming, you will keep up with class assignments, and you can spend the week before exams or due dates, reviewing material, not learning it for the first time.

Get comfortable and avoid distractions

Part of setting a schedule for yourself involves choosing a location and environment that you associate with reading each day. For some, this environment can be a busy coffee shop and might include some caffeine and a few snacks. For others, this may mean going to library and shutting out all distractions, including food and noise. Learn what works for you so you’ll be more likely to stick to your schedule and be productive.

Before reading, skim the whole piece first

Read the title and the first few sentences to get the general idea of the piece. Ask who the writer is writing for and why.

Drop the highlighter and get a pen

Write down questions, comments, etc. next to important passages. If you do highlight a passage, write a brief note explaining why you think it is important. You might also choose to take notes on your laptop or in a separate notebook.

Write down unfamiliar words in a notebook, but keep going

Do not stop and look up all unfamiliar words as you are reading or you may lose your concentration and focus. Also, if you encounter a passage you do not understand, read it a few times and then move on. Often, unclear passages can be comprehended by the context of the rest of the essay. Another technique you can try if you encounter a difficult passage is to try translating the passage into your own words.

Another handout you may be interested in...

Understanding and Interpreting an Assignment