



# Targeted reading and use of evidence: video tutorial

<http://www.screencast.com/t/T1v0QZeS>

## Transcript

**Introduction:** Welcome to this tutorial on Targeted Reading and Use of Evidence from the University of Reading Study Advice team. The tutorial is designed for you to go through at your own pace and you can pause it at any time.

**Slide 1:** This is Lewis. He knows he needs to do wider reading for his essay, but his reading list seems huge and intimidating, and he doesn't know where to start.

**Slide 2:** But if Lewis builds up his research approach in a targeted way, his reading will be manageable and efficient. Targeted reading means:

- Starting from your own ideas
- Identifying what you want to find out
- Being selective
- Reading actively
- And using your evidence to support your ideas, not replace them

**Slide 3:** So starting from your own ideas. Lewis has been given the following essay question. He starts by noting down his initial ideas in response to the question. Like Lewis, you may have initial ideas about your essay questions based on:

- Ideas from your own experience and previous learning
- Ideas from lectures and seminars
- Areas for more research or ideas to test with further reading

Starting from your own ideas gives your research a direction and prevents you from losing track of your own valuable thoughts once you start reading everyone else's ideas.

**Slide 4:** Once you have identified your initial ideas you can use these to help you identify what you want to find out.

Lewis has two main areas relating to his question that he wants to find out more about. This gives him something specific he can look for in his reading to help focus it. Like Lewis it is a good idea to:

- Phrase what you want to find out as a question – so you can search for the answers.
- Look at where the gaps in your understanding are – so you can use your reading to fill them.
- Identify which areas you need to find more evidence or examples for.
- Consider where there might be counter examples – so you can test your ideas and thinking against alternative viewpoints – your views may change or develop.

**Slide 5:** Now you have identified what you want to find out, you need to be selective in what you choose to read to find these things out.

You are not expected to read everything on your reading list, and you don't need to read everything to be successful. Start by selecting one or two sources.

You can gain many clues about whether a source will be useful from looking at things like the titles, dates of publication and type of source (book, journal article etc.) on your reading list.

For example, if you haven't encountered a topic before, it is a good idea to start by looking at a basic overview, such as a text book or encyclopaedia (such as this encyclopaedia on child development). A short introductory encyclopaedia article will give you a framework of the key concepts that you can then start to build detail onto with more in-depth reading.

A general book on a topic (like this introduction to major child development theorists) can be a good source to look at next to build up detail and develop ideas. You wouldn't need to read such a book from cover to cover, but use things like the index and contents page to go directly to the most relevant sections. This is why it's helpful to phrase what you want to find out as questions so you can hunt for answers to them.

Then you may decide to look at more current research for example in a recent journal article. Journal articles are often quite dense and detailed so knowing the basic concepts first can help. Also, especially in the sciences, it can be best to look at the most recent research as often older methods and findings will have been surpassed and be out of date.

Once you have read two or three sources you can start to bring your ideas together (for example in a plan or mind map) and see if you need to do further reading to fill in any gaps – this selective and staged approach will help any more reading you do be even more targeted.

**Slide 6:** When you have selected your sources, what about the reading process itself? Have you ever been in that situation when you are reading a text and highlighting it, reading a text and highlighting it and then find you can remember nothing of what you've just read? This is because just reading and highlighting is quite a passive activity. To get the most from your reading, it is a good idea to practice 'active reading'. What this means is engaging with the text, connecting what you read to what you already know, and capturing the information in a way that is meaningful to you. So if you are reading actively you would use the shape and layout of the text to find the structure of the information, and take notes in a way that helps you think about what you are reading and use it, such as annotating the text or writing down key words.

**Slide 7:** So now you have your research, how do you integrate it into your writing to support your points? A good way of thinking about this is to look at a model of a paragraph. This model is just a framework, so not all your paragraphs will look exactly like this, but they should contain each of these elements.

You start your paragraph by making your point, then you support this point with evidence from your wider reading and research. The evidence won't stand on its own – you have to interpret it and explain how it supports your point. Finally you link your point back to your essay question and show how this point contributes to your answer to the question.

Of all these elements of a paragraph, the evidence needs to be referenced and it comes from your reading, but the way in which you select your points, interpret the evidence, and link them back to your overall answer all reveal your own thinking and choices (even if you are not writing 'I think' or 'My opinion is...'). What you are trying to avoid is simply having lots of paragraphs made quotes or paraphrases of other people's words without any of your own points or interpretation. Your thinking is valuable and is what will get you marks.

**Slide 8:** Here is an example of what a paragraph containing all these elements (highlighted in different colours) would look like. You can pause the tutorial and look at this example in more depth if you would like.

**In summary:** So to recap – to be targeted in your reading and use of evidence:

- Start from your own ideas so you have a direction for your research
- Identify what you want to find out to give your reading a focus
- Be selective in what you choose to read – start with 2 or 3 sources and identify any gaps
- Read actively by annotating and engaging with what you read
- And finally, use your evidence to support your points not replace them – start by writing the points you want to make rather than trying to fit all the evidence you have into an essay.

This will ensure your essays are on target for success.