Reading academic texts: video tutorial

http://www.screencast.com/t/afiEROrgT

Transcript

Introduction: Welcome to this tutorial on Reading Academic Texts 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: Reading is just reading – well, isn't it? But how would you go about reading say, a novel in comparison to a magazine, or a glossy advert, or even your module handbook? It's very unlikely that you'd approach them in the same way as we all adopt different reading strategies depending on the type of text we're reading and why – even if we might not consciously realise that this is what we're doing.

Slide 2: The same is true for academic reading, you need certain approaches and strategies for this type of reading as it's different. When you are reading academic texts, you are reading critically (this doesn't just mean negatively) but that you have a purpose for your reading, that you need to select what to focus on, and that you need to read actively to make what you read useful and meaningful for you.

Slide 3: Before you start any academic reading it is good to spend a few moments thinking about your purpose for doing this reading. It may be quite general such as developing background knowledge of a new topic, it may be more specific such as answering a particular question that you have, or it may be to build your understanding and fill in gaps after gaining the basic knowledge from say, a lecture, or it might be for a different purpose. Identifying what you want to get out of your reading means you can be more efficient, targeted and motivated rather than diving straight in.

Slide 4: Having a purpose enables you to be selective. At university you are likely to be told (many times) that you need to read widely, but this doesn't mean that you are expected to read *everything*. Trying to do this is demotivating, impossible and just simply not necessary for success. But how do you know what to select? A good strategy is to remind yourself of your purpose for reading as asking, "What am I trying to find out?" helps you focus on where you can best find this out so you can select a more manageable and relevant number of texts to read. Also unlike a novel that has a plot and a narrative, academic texts are not designed to be read from cover to cover. You also select which parts to read within a text using the structure of the text such as the contents page, index and headings to direct you straight to the information that you need. Being selective is probably one of the most important abilities from academic reading that you'll develop throughout your time at university.

Slide 5: To be efficient at reading academically, you need to read actively. If you just read academic texts over and over hoping the information will somehow pour into your brain, you're likely to fall asleep and not remember what you've read. This is because you are reading over and over is a passive way of reading. To read actively you need to *do* something with the information you read to engage with it – such as creating mindmaps, different forms of notes, or making connections between what you've read.

Slide 6: Here are some more strategies for active reading, such as asking yourself questions about what you're reading, which will help you engage critically with the text. You can pause the video at this point to look at them in more detail and perhaps select one or two that might fit with your style of working.

Slide 7: Your reading list will only include texts that have been chosen by your tutors. But to get the best marks, you will need to go beyond your reading list. Once you are choosing your own reading, you will need to know how to evaluate texts to decide what is suitable for academic reading. So imagine you are researching the effects of the rise in tuition fees at UK universities. Which of these sources might you consider reading and why: a journal article, a book, a Wikipedia entry, a news story, and a satirical cartoon? Each and all of these sources may be suitable for different reasons depending on your purpose and what you are trying to find out. A Wikipedia article may give a useful introductory overview to help orientate yourself in a new topic, a news story or cartoon are topical but not necessarily academically rigorous, but they could be useful to show media opinions at the time.

Summary: So to summarise, getting the most out of your academic reading is really about what you bring to the text - a purpose for your reading, a readiness

to select texts based on their suitability and relevance, strategies for reading actively, and most importantly a questioning attitude to what you read. If you do this, you will get what you need from what you read.