**READ to SUCCEED?**

**a collaborators’ handbook**

Reading, and the associated researching, is the process by which students acquire most of the subject–knowledge on their degrees. Tutors often complain that students don’t read enough**.**  Academic reading skills would seem to be essential for student success.

Academic reading, as opposed to academic writing, has not been much researched. (Wingate, U. 2015). And students may not be experienced academic readers when they arrive. There is a lot of expertise out there to help them – the trouble is sometimes it stays in the specialist silos and is not shared. The answer may be, firstly, to share existing expertise, secondly, to encourage more research and thirdly to explicitly teach the reading skills that students need. Could this be done most effectively within subject-specific modules?

It is hoped this Handbook will be useful for librarians, learning technologists, language specialists, disability advisers and anyone else who enables students to read better which includes subject tutors. It is organised on the basis of the **3 Ls**. the specialist knowledge that all reading enablers need:

* knowledge about the **language** of academic texts
* knowledge about the **learning processes** that reading these texts involves
* knowledge about all the different **learners** who may have difficulty with these processes

This Handbook is very much a work in progress. To suggest improvements or amendments or to obtain extra copies of the Handbook contact the writer Christina Healey ***(***[***c.healey@sheffield.ac.uk***](mailto:c.healey@sheffield.ac.uk)***)***

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### Different kinds of academic reading within the undergraduate curriculum

It can be useful to distinguish four different kinds of academic reading required within a course Module:

1. **Procedural reading** i.e. what the student has to read and understand in order to handle the procedures of the course. This could include Assignment Briefs, Schemes of Work, submission guidance, Exam Papers, etc.
2. **Core reading:** reading which consolidates the course input in order to achieve the specified Learning /Teaching Outcomes. This could include powerpoint slides, handouts, prescribed textbooks etc. Remember that ‘reading’ involves reading visuals and figurative/quantative data as well as words.
3. **Extended reading**: tutors are always urging students to ‘read more’. Extensive reading is said to be the way to high achievement. But there are problems: How can students know what are valid and viable sources or will they just drown in the internet? How can they be sure that their search will yield something which is relevant to the particular assignment? Added to this is students’ lack of time and/or motivation.
4. **Personal reading** – the skills and attitudes the student needs to read her/his own work to avoid accidental plagiarism, repetition, inaccuracies etc and edit her/his work in order that it communicates her/his ideas as effectively and efficiently as possible.

**STUDENTS WILL NEVER HAVE UNDERTAKEN MOST OF THESE KINDS OF READING BEFORE. IT MAKES SENSE TO TEACH THEM HOW TO DO IT.**

### The language of the academy

**No-one speaks (or writes) academic English as a first language (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994, p. 8). Everyone has to learn it by observation, study and experiment. Academic texts can be different from anything a student has read before so s/he has to learn new reading skills.** Adapted from: Using English for Academic Purposes A Guide for Students in Higher Education. Academic Writing. Andy Gillett [UEfAP: Academic Writingwww.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm](http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm) *(accessed 17th November 2015)*

**Some characteristics of academic English** *(from the top down)*

Written academic English often consists of kinds of texts (sometimes called **genre)** which do not usually exist outside the academy. Examples of this can be academic articles or textbooks or lab reports. The nature of these texts can vary between disciplines. Each genre will follow certain ‘rules’ for how it is organised. Reader need to be experienced enough to recognise these rules and know how to use key features of an academic text such as a Reference List, an Abstract or an Index. Academic texts often including signposting phrase such as ‘firstly’ or ‘in conclusion’ which can help the reader.

Below the whole text there will sections of text and subsections. These sections are usually formed of paragraphs. **Paragraphs** also tend to be organised according to rules. Most well–written academic paragraphs have a key sentence near the beginning which sums up what the paragraph is about. This sentence is first expanded upon and then illustrated with examples. Readers have to be competent enough to highlight this main idea and not be distracted by an entertaining example. Most paragraphs are linked together with words and phrases which help to make the meaning ’flow’.

Paragraphs consist of sentences which follow on from one another. Every **sentence** has a Subject, an Actor which will be in the form of a Noun and an Action which will be in the form of a Verb. Some sentences also have an Object which will be also be in the form of a Noun. In English it matters in what **order** the Subject, Verb and possible Object occur. In certain kinds of academic texts nouns can take the form of long phrases known as nominalisations. Sentences are not usually just an arrangement of one Subject, one Verb and (possibly) one or more Objects. There will often be a main clause and then a number of subordinate clauses. The longer a sentence is the harder it can be for the reader to unlock the meaning.

Every sentence consists of **words and phrases**. In academic texts these words and phrases may differ from usual spoken vocabulary or they may have a special meaning within the discipline.

**What does the reading /learning process involve?**

**What is reading?**

Reading, unlike speaking, does not come ‘naturally’. It has to be learnt. Many societies in the past have done fine without reading, they’ve fed and clothed themselves, waged wars, made love and created and transmitted extraordinary oral artefacts such as stories and poems. Before the advent of the printing press literacy was very much the domain of a ’cloistered’ (literally) elite. It can be argued that social media have changed the reading process again, turning it from a linear process of deciphering symbols (either from left to right or from right to left) to something far more visual and multi-dimensional. But it’s still reading.

**The process is complex**.

First the reader has to look at the shapes on the page/screen. This can be a painful process for some people because of what is known as **Visual Stress.** This can be related to bright/flickering lighting but also rigid patters, usually of stripes, and also to glaring/uncongenial background colours. **Visual stress** can be linked to migraines, epilepsy and also the autistic spectrum. Coloured filters/screens help significantly although different colours suit different people. If students are alerted to the existence of visual stress they can often find their own strategies to cope.

**The need for experience**

Next the reader needs to be **experienced,** in other wordss/hehas to recognise what kind of text s/he is reading e.g. a textbook, a government report, an academic article, something from a newspaper. Students need to know what to expect from the different genres they are required to read. They need to know what to expect from Headings and Case Studies and Abstracts, Indexes and bio data etc.

**Converting written symbols into sounds**

Next the (hopefully) visually unstressed and experienced learner in most western orthographies, has to **convert the written symbols into sounds.** Some learners do this more slowly than others because they are neurologically different. **Also English is not an easy language to read.** Unlike most other European languages English is not a regular language, in other words the same symbols don’t always indicate the same sounds. For example ‘red’

and read’ could indicate the same sounds or perhaps not. The English symbols for vowel sounds are particularly inconsistent. To be a competent reader of English the student needs two different strategies, s/he needs to be able to ‘sound out’ a word using known phonemic rules e.g. “nite” can be sounded successfully applying the rule that a final ‘e; always makes the vowel ‘sound its own name’. But s/he has also to be able to recognise the word ’knight’ visually as a whole. Many second language users will not have had to learn these skills on their own language and so will tend to read English more slowly.

**Making meaning out of sounds and symbols**

Finally **the learner has to make meaning out of these sounds** and symbols by matching them with their memory bank of words and phrases already known. Again not easy. ‘Read’ and ‘reed’ look different, sound the same and mean differently. Many of the words our students have to read only appear in academic texts. They won’t have come across them in the coffee bar or on television. And they won’t know what they sound like.

**Understanding the grammar and word order of English**

It’s not just a question of giving meaning to the individual words that they have deciphered. Learners have to be confident with the grammar and word order of English.

For example: they have to be able to interpret very quickly the distinction in the two verb forms ‘*I lived in Sheffield’* and ‘*I have lived in Sheffield for . .* ’. The only difference in the two sentences; *‘The dog bit the man‘* and ‘*The man bit the dog’* is in the word order emphasised by the different Capital letters but the difference in meaning is crucial. Learners have to interpret punctuation symbols as well as grammar and vocabulary.

*Eats shoots and leaves. / Eats, shoots and leaves.* The difference in meaning between these two sentences is not in the spelling or, to a certain extent in the punctuation, It is in the knowledge of the different grammatical functions i.e. noun or verb which indicates the difference in meaning between two of the key words even though they are spelt and sound the same.

**Grammar at above the sentence level**

The need for grammatical competence doesn’t just obtain at the sentence level it also applies above the sentence level. Readers have to be able to see how sentences fit together into longer texts.

**Where can learners have difficulties with these processes?**

Students may not be skilled academic readers when they first arrive. Many will be reading in a second or third language, some will have specific learning differences (SpLDs) which affect their reading, most will have been out of formal education for some time.

The business of converting symbols into sounds and sounds into meanings is known as processing and some learners are slower at it than others. If a learner has an inefficient short - term memory s/he may get to the end of a sentence or paragraph and not remember the beginning. This can be very stressful and impair understanding. Learners who have learnt to read in a language other than English may handle any difficulties with reading by continually translating in and out of their stronger language. This will slow them down.

**HOW TO HELP**

**How tutors can help**

**WRITE** your handouts as simply and clearly as possible. Simplicity is not banality. Don’t use an unnecessarily varied vocabulary unless it is essential. Don’t construct very long sentences. Your aim should be to communicate not to impress. This will set a model for students in their own writing.

**ALWAYS** provide a short glossary of key specialist terms to support your Handouts

**ANNOTATE** your book lists. Indicate what is essential and what is merely desirable. Is there one Chapter in the textbook that is more important than the others?

**NEVER** dictate notes or ask students to read aloud in class (unless they want to of course).

**ENCOURAGE** quality reading rather than quantity reading. Guide students about how to use their reading time best.

**PROVIDE** reading material which is similar to what students will have to write both in Assignments and on placements.

**ALWAYS** provide powerpoint slides /other handout s 48 hours in advance for ALL students.

**NEVER** forget that not all students like to read from slides

**TIMETABLE** at least some Seminar sessions to modelling how to read key texts using the template on page 8 .

**ALWAYS** find something to be encouraging about in your Feedback. And be as specific as possible about what is good and what needs improvement.

**How language and learning specialists can help**

Language and learning specialist may have 1 2 1 meetings learners with reading difficulties. They can take these opportunities to encourage and motivate students. They may also take this opportunity to explain how academic written language works or how neurological differences may make certain students read more slowly than their peers. Such specialists also have an important role liaising with specialists in the disciplines.

**Help from Assistive Technology (AT)**

*(with thanks to Chris Prothero, Accountancy student, Bloomsbury Institute)*

**Claro read** and **read & write**, both enable to you have a chosen text spoken to you. Although I like to read myself, I do find that, after a while, I become tired and my reading speed can drop off, which is not good when you have a 400 page core text book to get through in a short amount of time, so I find that these software programs can really help speed up this process. Equally, I find that the absorption level of what is heard is generally much higher than if I were to read it myself. The only drawback is that these types of software struggle to deal with tabular formats; columns with numbers etc.

**A tool for enabling reading** *(****to be adapted as appropriate)***

*NB This Worksheet is addressed to students .It needs to be adapted by tutors to fit their own teaching objectives and the particular text they wish to focus on.*

1. **REFERENCE** If you are reading a text for academic purposes then you are very likely to have to REFER to it in any writing you produce. So the first thing is to record the full details of the text as you will use them in a Reference List using Harvard.
2. **CONTEXT OF THE TEXT** Assemble the key facts about the text which will help you understand and evaluate it.

* date – if not recent then is it still worth reading?
* author(s) - what is their reputation in the field?
* publishing journal/book: is it reputable?
* country of origin: different countries have different research traditions which you need to be aware of

1. **REASONS FOR READING –** preparing your **QUESTIONS.** You need to be clear WHY you are reading this text. This will affect HOW you read it. Ask yourself ”What do I want to be able to do after reading this test that I couldn’t do before?” If you just want to check certain facts or research results you probably don’t have to read the whole article. Equally, if you want to find out the author’s opinion you can probably just read one section. Perhaps a tutor from your department has recommended it. If so you can ask her/him **why** it is important.
2. **SURVEY** Overlook the main parts of the text quickly in order to answer the Question “What is this really about?” If the text doesn’t have a title give it one. In an article focus on the Abstract. In a chapter of a text book focus on the first and last paragraphs. Then prepare a plan of the text using the Headings.
3. **CHECKOUT THE VISUALS** These can be tables, graphs, maps or photos etc. Often the visuals are repeating the same meaning as the words in the text but in a more accessible way. Ask yourself the Question ’What is this visual telling me about the text?’
4. **SUMMARISE.** This is where you make brief notes on the main points. If you copy any words from the text then put them clearly in quotation marks + the page number. Otherwise you may commit PLAGIARISM. without meaning to.
5. **ANSWER** Note down briefly the answers to the **QUESTIONS** you have prepared.
6. **EVALUATE.** The most important part of the activity. This is where you become a ’critical’ reader. How valuable is this source? What can you learn from it? What are its strengths and its weaknesses?
7. **LEARN FROM.** Reading academic writing carefully can help you improve your own academic writing. Can you identify any words or phrases which you don’t understand but which could be useful for you later?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Word + grammatical form**  (noun/verb /adj/adv) | **Definition** *(with reference if necessary)* | **In your own words** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

1. **USE** Can you identify any words or phrases which you could use in your own writing?

**Reading about reading** *(arranged in order of accessibility)*

Bartholomew, S. & Withers, J. (2019) Chapter 7 **Reading for a Purpose** in Making it at Uni, makingitatuni@gmail.com

A book to help new students navigate their way through the first year of their degree published by two staff members from the University of Wolverhampton. Chapter 7 contains student friendly guidance on how to read faster and how to bring purpose to our reading.

Godfrey, J. (2014) 2nd ed. **Reading and Making Notes**, Pocket Study Skills, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Again specially intended for undergraduates at the beginning of their studies .and fits easily into a rucksack or a back pocket. Starts with **10 myths about reading and making notes at university** which could easily be adapted by tutors as a way to start talking to students about the reading requirements on their Modules.

Thomas ,G. (2018) 2nd ed. **Doing research** Pocket Study Skills, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

The obvious sequel to Godfrey for 2nd& 3rd years given the close connection between reading and research. Has a useful section on writing a literature review.

Doffman Elaine (2014) **Reading at University**

An attractively illustrated and well-presented guide for students with a particular emphasis on dyslexic students. Obtainable from: [Elaine.Doffman@glyndwr.ac.uk](mailto:Elaine.Doffman@glyndwr.ac.uk)

Day, T. 2nd.ed. (2018) **Being a Purposeful Reader and Notetaker** in **Success in Academic Writing,** Palgrave Macmillan.

A lively, up to date book for both students and tutors.

Batliwala et.al. **Reading Strategies and Speed Reading in** Hargreaves, S. & Crabb, J. eds. (3rd ed. 2016) **Study Skills for Students with Dyslexia**, London, Sage.

Directly addresses dyslexic students rather than their minders. The Chapter on Reading Strategies lists 6 different techniques for reading faster.

Arnold Wilkins (2019) Presentation on Visual Stress at Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education (ADSHE) Conference 14/06/19: <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Yw07FbNLIJQc2YJPZmKYCiIFQGrJ1ZMthR6u_HGZcvw/edit?usp=sharing> (view only)

Society of Coloured Lens Prescribers [www.s4clp.org](http://www.s4clp.org/)

**Reading in transition: reflective questions.** University of Leicester, Leicester Learning Institute www.le.ac.uk/lli

### Krčmář, K. (editor) (2019) The Inclusivity Gap. Aberdeen, UK: Inspired By Learning. 34.68 € / £ 32.04 (eBook Single Download) 91.85 € / £ 84.84 (eBook Unlimited Download) ISBN (e-book): 978-1-909876-10-1 [www.inspiredbylearning.eu](http://www.inspiredbylearning.eu)

[Very](file:///\\\\\\\\\very) up to the minute and very comprehensive. More of a library rather than a book. Maybe too much for an individual budget but get your institution to buy it. Includes an essay on speed reading from a dyslexic perspective.

Wingate U.2015 **Academic Literacy and Student Diversity**, The Case for Inclusive Practice, Bristol, Multilingual Matters.

WingateU. (2018) ***Academic literacy across the curriculum: Towards a collaborative instructional approach*** - a speech reprinted in Language Teaching: page 1 of 16 Cambridge University Press 2016 [ursula.wingate@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:ursula.wingate@kcl.ac.uk)

Probably the most accessible and up to date introduction to Wingate’s ideas on academic language and literacy across the curriculum.

**Finally the ultimate question: Does becoming well-read help your learners’ assignments to become well-written?**

Not as easy as it might seem. What students are required to read is not the same as what they are required to write. Undergraduates are not likely to have to write academic articles or textbooks any time soon. But they can still learn some things from their reading which they can use in their writing.

Draw their attention to the things they can use now. For example:

* the specialist terminology of the discipline
* particular forms of grammar e.g. passives, nominalisations
* different ways of citing sources
* ways of ‘hedging’ - not committing oneself as a writer to an over-simplistic or over- personal point of view