

INSTRUCTOR: Active reading-- active reading is engaged and attentive reading. When you read actively, you preview a text before reading it, and you take an active role in the reading process itself. Active reading starts with previewing, which gives you a sense of what you are about to read and improves your ability to understand the material.

To preview, first think about what the title suggests. Do you have any thoughts or experience on this subject? If so, jot them down in the margin, or in a notebook, or text file. Next, scan the entire article. How long is it? Are there any headings or section titles? What do the headings tell you about the content?

Once you have a sense of the readings topic and basic organization, skim the first paragraph. In many short essays, the first paragraph introduces the main idea. The final paragraph of an essay usually contains the conclusion, which summarizes the essay's main point and may provide ways to think about its significance.

After previewing, it is time to practice active reading. Make predictions, make connections, ask questions, and annotate the text. To make predictions, think about where a piece of writing is headed based on the words and sentences you are reading at a given moment.

To make connections, look to see how one sentence relates to another. Notice how an author's details and facts support his or her main point. One of the most important strategies of active reading is to ask yourself questions about what you are reading while you are reading.

Here are the kinds of things you can ask questions about. The meaning of words, details, and how they connect to each other, the writer's intention, your own thoughts on the topic, and how the writing affects you, the audience. Annotating helps you keep your focus while you read. It can also help you when you need to study, or review for a test, when you need to write about your reading, or when you are asked to discuss the reading in class.

Annotating includes making notes in the margins, underlining and highlighting key words, phrases, and sentences, putting a check mark or star beside important passages, putting a question mark next to passages you do not understand, and drawing lines and arrows to make connections. The notes you make about a reading will vary depending on your thoughts about a particular passage.

There are basically four main types of annotations-- restating the main point of the passage, asking questions about the passage, challenging the ideas of the passage, and comparing or contrasting the passage with what you already know. Remember, active reading is engaged and attentive reading. When you read actively, you preview a text before reading it, and you take an active role in the reading process itself.