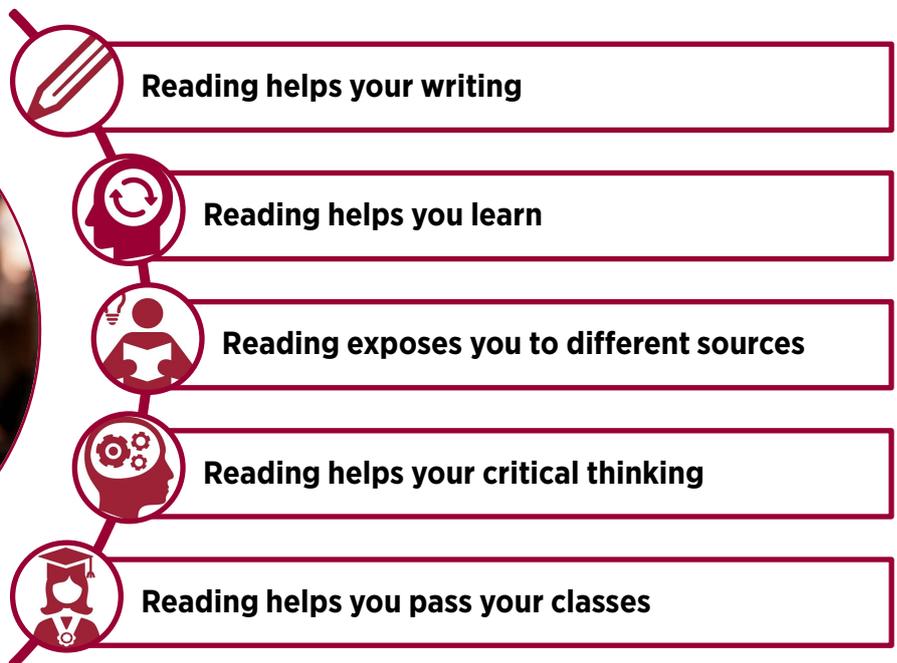**WESTERN SYDNEY**
UNIVERSITY

Library

# The why, when, and what of reading

**Proven benefits of reading**

Many students find reading for academic purposes difficult. Reading a textbook is very different to reading your social media feed or the cooking instructions on the back of a noodle packet.

Although academic reading can be hard work, it's necessary in order to succeed at university and in your career. Here's why:

**Reading helps your writing**

**Reading helps you learn**

**Reading exposes you to different sources**

**Reading helps your critical thinking**

**Reading helps you pass your classes**

### Reading helps your writing

Effective reading leads to effective writing, because reading lets you see how other people write. Reading gives you examples of sentence structures, new vocabulary, and differences in tone between genres. Quality resources will demonstrate correct use of grammar and punctuation, and can even model accurate citation for you. This kind of learning from reading can be almost subconscious, or it may be a bit more explicit (for example when you stop to look up a new word in your dictionary).

### Reading helps you learn

You need to become familiar with your discipline area, and the material cannot be communicated to you through tutorials and lectures alone. Reading helps you learn at a deeper level.

### Reading exposes you to different sources

You need to learn from multiple and varied sources. You might think your main source of information at university is your lecturer or your tutor. But that's just one or two people, and they probably don't know everything, and they may have different ideas to other people. Plus, people change their mind, while a written text is static and timeless – you can return to a book over and over and the information or opinions won't change. Reading is therefore a reliable source of information within a certain timeframe.

## Reading helps your critical thinking

Reading a range of sources exposes you to a range of ideas and opinions. If you take your lecturer as the only source of information you will only be getting one person's perspective. It might be a really interesting and useful perspective, and your lecturer probably knows almost all there is to know about the subject, but they are just one person. Effective critical thinking means you consider a range of ideas and information from a variety of sources. You will do this throughout your life, not just at university. Imagine you're buying a car – will you go with the first salesperson who approaches you, or will you visit a few different dealerships, talk to a range of sellers, read reviews and product information, and make a careful decision based on all the available evidence?

## Reading helps you pass your classes

You can't pass your classes if you don't read. Simple as that. You need to read to keep up with class content, and you need to perform research for most types of assessments.

## When to read

There are 3 main contexts for your reading at university: lectures, tutorials, and assignments. The same reading might be useful for all 3 contexts, or you may have to read different texts for each one.

You need to do the reading…

…before **lectures** so that you have a working knowledge of the background of the topic. Your lecturer will discuss specifics and build on concepts you learned in your reading.

…before **tutorials** so that you can raise any questions you have or concepts you need clarified. You also need to be able to participate in discussions and activities based on the reading or other pre-class activities.

…for **assignments** to help you find an answer, investigate a problem, or formulate an argument. This is called research.

## What to read

What you read depends on the context. Many units will set regular readings for before lectures and tutorials. Follow your weekly readings so that you can keep up with the classes, and refer to How to read effectively (PDF, 256 kB) to maximise your time.

Reading for assignments or research, however, can be different to reading for your classes. Some units will give you a reading list for an assignment, possibly divided into essential and optional items. Often you'll be expected to find more readings on your own, which is called research – see the Library's Successful Searching module for more information.

It can be difficult to keep track of what you have already read and what you need to read next, so come up with a system early on for managing your reading lists and notes. See our Study Smart guides on General note-taking (PDF, 134 kB) and Note-taking techniques (PDF, 526 kB), as well as Organising your reading (PDF, 68 kB). You should always make sure you have some pen and paper or a note-making app ready before you start reading so that you can immediately write down any important information you come across.

Now that you're ready to start reading, look at our guide on How to read effectively (PDF, 256 kB).

**See also:**

→   Using digital textbooks
→   Digital learning and development
→   Western Sydney U Library YouTube channel

**External links to help you:**

→ An Open Letter to High School Students about Reading
→ Palgrave Study Skills: Reading and Research Strategies

**References**

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*UniStep guide: Making the transition to university* (10th ed.). (2013). Sydney, Australia: Hub for Academic Literacy and

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