

Imagine a delicious meal — but without any of its usual seasoning. A bit boring maybe?



Sometimes textbook reading seems kind of like that. In fact, one of clients told me that when he tried to read he “zoned out,” and by the end of the article he had forgotten what the point was.

Although you don't have to read every word you're assigned, you do need to understand the key ideas and remember important supporting details.

I teach my students to first spend a few minutes on a pre-reading plan. One student's plan looked like this:

1. Read the shortest and most interesting articles first.
2. Read the article most likely to present an opposing point of view.
3. After each article ask myself, “What is interesting here? What might give me a possible thesis for my reflection?”

Once you have the plan, you can use any of the study hacks below — five ways to spice up your reading and retain what you read in the process.

### 1. Annotate as you read

Annotation is one of the best reading study hacks. It means taking notes in the margins (or in a separate word processing document) as you read. Your notes might identify key ideas or definitions, questions, potential quotes, or your own perspective on the topic.

These notes will help you outline a reflection paper, quickly find supporting evidence for a research paper, or come up with something interesting to say in your seminar (bring your annotated readings with you to class).

Annotating will also help you retain and comprehend the information you read no matter how challenging the material.

### 2. Skim

Skimming is a key reading skill, and another of the top reading study hacks. Skimming is not just rushing through an assignment. There's an art to it.

First, get clear about what you're looking for as you read. What questions do you need to answer? What's the topic you want to write about? [What is your potential thesis?](#)

Next look for passages that align with your goals, quotes that answer the reflection questions or support your thesis.

For example, one of my clients was asked to reflect on this question: “How did food domestication during the Neolithic Period alter the fundamental relationship between humans and plants and animals?”

One of the assigned articles included a lengthy description of evolving agricultural practices

which was only peripherally related to the reflection question. Strategic skimming saved about half an hour on this article alone.



### **3. Rewrite key ideas in your own words**

Every article, section, or couple of pages pause and consider the key ideas. Make your own outline as you go, again emphasizing the questions you are asked to reflect on.

Reorganizing information helps you learn it more effectively, which is why this is Rewriting makes the list as one of the top 5 reading study hacks. It forces you to stay active and involved with the text, to consider arguments and synthesize information, and thus remember more of what you read.

### **4. Write a critique**

Another of the top 5 reading study hacks is to look for ideas you disagree with. Describe why you disagree as thoughtfully as you can, and bring your ideas to class. Talking about controversial ideas in an academic setting will not only help you remember them, but also it will get you to think about alternatives and get more clear about your own ideas.

Thoughtful discussions with classmates (or your prof during office hours) about provocative idea can be one of the most memorable things you do in college.

### **5. List your questions**

You can also list things you're puzzled about, or things you don't understand. Listing these (and talking or writing about them later) is one way to find clarity.

Your questions can also help you find an interesting thesis. What are you curious about? What would you like to explore?

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If you're ready to take your academic game to the next level, please contact me. Together we can explore more study hacks, and create a strategy that will help you excel in school and enjoy learning.