



Reading Actively • Principles, Tips and Steps

PRINCIPLES

- √ **Your goals** are to 1) identify the thesis (main argument), 2) how it fits into larger questions and theory, and 3) evaluate the argument's strengths and weaknesses.
- √ **Don't read the entire article** word for word; instead, read *only select parts* of the article word for word, sentence by sentence.
- √ **Jump around** in a relatively organized way.
- √ **Take your time** when reading and analyzing these select pieces of the article—put your time where it counts.
- √ **Stop and think** about each sentence you read and what it means for the thesis.
- √ **Write** key points in your own words; use as few words as possible.

TIPS

- √ Use active-reading techniques in a pinch to save time or for a quick review.
- √ Also, use active reading techniques *before* you do thorough readings; you'll know better if the article is worth reading carefully, get much more out of the details, and remember more.
- √ Look for repeated messages, words and ideas.
- √ Look for key words and phrases such as:
 - **Author's objective and the larger question**—"our aim is to... The goal here is to... this book examines/re-examines... this work offers/identifies... We build upon... This analysis is important because...."
 - **Author's thesis**—"We have shown that... This data helps explain.... In short... In conclusion... To sum up...."
 - **Logic of evidence**—"First....second....third...; Therefore....; If X, then Y."
 - **Empirical evidence**—Scope such as time, place, system, focus; sources.
 - **Key definitions**—Standard? Or being redefined? Look up what you don't know.

Steps

1. **Prepare** by looking for clues around the specific article/chapter.
 1. Class topic
 2. Title of the book
 3. Table of contents
 4. Back cover and inside jacket cover if one is available. "Look Inside!"
 5. Publishing date and publisher
2. **Search** for thesis, objectives, and bigger picture. **"What's it about?"**
 1. Analyze title and subheadings.
 2. Read conclusion, or last paragraph.
 3. Restate the conclusion in your own words.
 4. Read introduction, or first paragraph.
 5. Restate the introduction in your own words. Compare this to what you wrote down for the conclusion. Adjust what you wrote, if needed.
 6. Read the first sentence of each paragraph.
 7. Reread the conclusion and what you wrote down.
3. **"Destroy"** for sufficient evidence and logic. **"What do you think of it?"**
 1. Identify evidence by reading first sentences of paragraphs
 2. Critique empirical evidence
 - Relevant? Accurate? Other evidence helps or hurts case?
 - Sufficient?
 3. Critique logical evidence
 - Does B follow from A?
 - Are assumptions made reasonable?
 4. Reassess the author's thesis.
 - Do you agree? Write down your answer.
 - Why or why not? Write down your answer.
 5. How might it matter if the author is right or wrong?