

UNDERSTANDING COMPLEX MATERIALS

The key steps that may help you when reading difficult material are:

1. Get into an “I can do it” frame of mind.
2. Figure out what is causing your problem
3. Try some strategies for overcoming the problem

Possible Problems	Possible strategies
Lack of confidence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Talk positive to yourself 2. Break up lengthy readings into manageable study sections 3. Reward yourself for completing a study section 4. Get a tutor, or share your notes on the readings with a classmate
No preparation for reading	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Study the title and subtitles of the article; think about what you already know about the topic 2. Review your lecture notes about the topic before you read 3. If there is a chapter introduction, read it, (or at least read the portion summarizing the essay you plan to read) 4. Read the introduction (usually the first 1-3 paragraphs) and the conclusion (To locate the conclusion, scan the last 1-5 paragraphs for signal words such as these: Therefore, in conclusion, as a result, finally, in summary, from this we see, thus, hence, etc.)
Argument difficult to follow because of its complexity	<p>Don't expect to understand a complicated essay with just one reading. Try these various techniques and adapt whichever one works best for you:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Skim the article (read the first sentence in each paragraph—if the main point isn't there keep reading until you locate it). Fill your mind with the main points, then read the essay a second time, recording or underlining relevant support for main ideas. 2. Read the article carefully; then skim to concentrate on details. 3. Read it twice, restating the author's points <u>in your own words</u> at the end of each section, page or paragraph. 4. Read it aloud; auditory stimulation reinforces the image. 5. Take notes during the class discussion of

	the article; skim to find the important points discussed in class. Mark those ideas, then study them in detail.
Mind wanders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. See the concentration handout for specific causes and solutions for distractions 2. Read faster or try skimming 3. Restate the author's ideas at the end of each paragraph or page. 4. Have questions in mind when you read; look answers to these questions. Three basic questions are <u>what</u> (what is the topic), <u>how</u> (how does the topic function) and <u>why</u> (why is the topic important)
Insufficient background knowledge: The author is presuming knowledge you don't have.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Skim survey books or student study guides on the subject. 2. Skim the portion in your textbook relating to that topic. 3. Skim an encyclopedia article on that topic. 4. Talk to someone knowledgeable.
Long complicated sentence structures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Slow down. Re-read if necessary. 2. Try to break the long sentence down into parts. Isolate the clauses and phrases and concentrate on the heart of the sentence. 3. Look for connecting words like "however," "but," and "therefore" that act as signposts. Look for signals such as "first," "then," or "after" which show time or sequence of ideas. 4. Put the thought of the sentence into your own words.
Unfamiliar words that are necessary for understanding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guess at the meaning on the basis of <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Context (the sentence or sentences surrounding the word) b. Familiar word parts (prefixes, suffixes, roots) 2. Check your lecture notes for an explanation of terms. 3. Look the word up in a dictionary (or glossary if your book contains one). 4. Ask someone knowledgeable.

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