**TLC PODCASTS: Reading** **for academic purposes**

Reading actively and critically for your studies is a particular skill that supports discovery, reflection, and debate. As with any other skill, you can learn, practice, and improve how you approach texts for academic purposes. This hand-out, along with Monday’s podcast on reading, identifies some key points to keep in mind as you get started with your reading lists.

**Selecting your readings**

Your reading lists are a selection of texts that your teachers recommend. You are not necessarily expected to read all the texts on the list. You should also be able to find other relevant texts in addition to those on the list.

* Be selective with the types of texts you select! There is simply too much information and you cannot read it all. One important academic and professional skill you are developing is how to choose a set of resources that are best adapted for your particular aims (e.g. discovering a topic, understanding something in-depth, finding examples, researching for an essay or dissertation).
* Introductory academic texts–like handbooks, dictionaries, or encyclopaedia–could be a good place to start if you are discovering a topic for the first time.
* Learn to recognise different types of texts by the bibliographic information (e.g. journal articles, theses, working papers or conference papers, monographs, edited volumes) and the qualities of different types of texts in your discipline.
* Evaluate and prioritise the readings you select from your list. Be sure you cover the “essential” readings; but remember that you should also begin to develop skills that allow you to find and other useful texts independently.
* If you have a doubt, ask your course lecturers for advice on how to approach the reading lists they have prepared.

**Exploring and engaging in texts actively**

Reading actively involves constantly questioning the text, questioning yourself, checking and testing your understanding.

* Read in different “phases”. Before you even pick up a text, take time to reflect on what you’d like to learn from the text, based on your own goals and reasons for reading the text. Write this down.
* Scan the text to find out what you can expect to find. Write this down, in your own words.
* Read the abstract/introduction and conclusion to identify the author’s main argument. Write this down, again using your own words.
* Map out the structure of the text. Draw or write out the various elements of the test.
* Using what you’ve discovered by scanning, skimming, and mapping out the text, reconsider what you set out to find from the text. Then make an informed decision about which parts you will read in more detail.
* There is no requirement to read the text in the order the author presents it. There is also no requirement to read every part of the text with the same degree of attention. Prioritise what you’d like to gain from the text and give attention to each part accordingly.

**Using time wisely**

* Plan for different “phases” of reading activities (e.g. downloading, photocopying, or printing texts; retrieving books or journals from the library; searching databases, organising references and notes in Mendeley, EndNote or other information management tools; scanning, skim-reading, in-depth reading, etc.)
* Think about your energy and attention levels throughout the day and prioritise “prime time” for more challenging tasks.
* Consider scheduling several shorter periods of time for reading, rather than a single day or block of several hours.