| **INFORMATION SKILLS**	**Academic reading**
University Library	

Everyone knows how to read, surely? University, however, makes additional demands on both the quantity and the density of what you need to read. This brief guide provides some pointers which may help. We've kept it short to avoid adding to the reading load!

Make a habit of reading
It's always easier to do something you're familiar with and practiced at. The more you can develop a habit of reading – making quality time for it, fitting it into odd corners of the day which might otherwise be wasted – the more you'll find that reading comes naturally.

> **But there's just so much I need to read!**
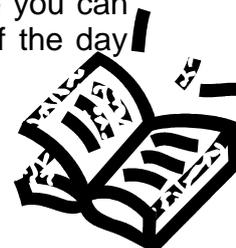
No one's going to pretend that University doesn't involve a lot of reading – whether it's books, journals, web pages or social networking updates, there's a lot to get through. But you may not have to read every word.

- **Books** – look at the contents pages to get an overview of the subject covered; see if there's a summary – if not, the introduction or first chapter may act as a form of summary of the whole book. When reading a chapter, look at the first paragraph and the last which may provide a summary of its content; note the headings used in the chapter and any figures or diagrams which may summarize the argument or the discussion.
- **Journal articles & conference proceedings** – these may come with an abstract which summarizes the main content. You may even have found the article via a database which *only* contains such abstracts – don't miss them! If there is no abstract, treat them like a book chapter (see above).
- **Web pages** – use the search option in your browser (e.g. <ctrl>F in Windows Explorer) to find keywords that you're interested in; learn to skim through a page to see what you need to read in more detail; try to ignore distractions such as advertising and save clicking on further links of interest until you've finished absorbing the page you're on.

> ***What* should I be reading?**

Academic reading can be tougher going as you'll almost certainly be expected to read more widely and more deeply than just a textbook or Wikipedia article (although the latter can have references at the end of an article to good scholarly material, as well as providing a quick summary of a subject). You'll need to be familiar with a variety of types of scholarly literature – journal articles, conference proceedings, books, reference works, and much more. Our interactive slideshow called 'The Information Landscape' can really help with this.

Read actively

Don't just read passively as though you were devouring the latest blockbuster novel. To get the most out of your reading – and to avoid having to return to it later – interact with the text. Make notes as you go, look for quotes which support your argument (or that you want to argue against), summarize the article, chapter, book or web page when you've finished. Keep a collection (perhaps a notebook or a Word file) of such notes along with a proper reference to the item that you've been reading (see our Referencing@Portsmouth site for help with this: http://referencing.port.ac.uk/). This should reduce the amount of time you need to track down something you've already read.

Look at the context

It's very easy - particularly with e-books, e-journals and powerful internet search engines - to find a fragment of text and hurry on to the next thing. But your understanding of the literature and your engagement with the subject can be vastly improved by looking at the context of what you're reading. On a web page, look at the URL and see if you can decode who is publishing the page – is a company website? A student homepage? A blog entry? In a journal article, examine the title of the journal; look at the references they give to see what has informed their writing (and these may also be a good source of information for *your* work); you may even want to go further and look for papers which cite the one you're reading. (Ask your subject librarian for more help on this.) When reading a part of a book (perhaps because you've been led there by the index), take a moment to look at the book as a whole – title, the author (are they well known in the field?), the other chapters. All of this will give you a better overview of how what you're reading fits into the bigger picture.

Review your notes

It's all too easy to file your notes away – whether paper or electronic – and not take time to look at them again. While there is value in taking notes at the time, they become even more valuable as an aid to memory and a review of the subject matter if you make the time to review them systematically. This might be as you work on an assignment where the topic is relevant, or before an exam as a revision aid. Some people find mindmaps helpful.

Have a system!

However you manage it – paper based, electronic, a mixture of both – it is worth developing a good system for keeping both the notes you make and the formal references to the material. (You may even be keeping copies of articles or chapters so that you can review them again.) Develop a good mechanism for doing this early before you're overwhelmed by all the material you're dealing with and review the *system* (as well as its contents) to ensure it is still meeting your needs. Use good referencing software whether it's the University's EndNote (or EndNote Web if you want to use it off campus) or internet options such as Mendeley, Zotero, Connotea, or CiteULike (a bit like del.icio.us for academic papers) which also allows you to share your finds with others. Software such as EndNote can even let you 'attach' any electronic files (e.g. PDFs of journal articles) so that it can help you file and retrieve such material. See our page on reference management tools.

And of course, having a good system takes us back to where we started by forming good habits.

> All the best with your reading. Don't be intimidated by it – make it work for you to show to your academics that you're a real master of your subject! Doing this well can make all the difference to your final degree classification.