

Online Reading Strategies Transcript

In an online educational environment, you're probably going to do more reading than listening. You may do some of your reading in printed form, say, an assigned novel or textbook, but some of it might also be online in the form of a webpage. Reading online isn't the same as reading in print, so you should practice some strategies that will improve your online reading comprehension and speed. And some of the tactics you learn about here will help you with any kind of reading you might do, not just the stuff that's online. After completing this module, you'll: understand some of the differences between reading print versus reading online; learn strategies for staying focused when reading online; and discover ways to maximize your reading speed and comprehension.

So what do we mean when we say that reading print is different from reading online? First, when you read something let's say, a book; that's been printed by a reputable publishing house, you can assume that the work is authoritative. The author had to be vetted by a publishing house and multiple editors, right? But when you read something online, it might have been written or posted by anybody. This means that you have to seriously evaluate the authority of the information you're reading. Pay attention to who was writing what you're reading. Can you identify the author? What are his or her credentials? Second, in the print world, texts may include pictures, graphics, or other visual elements to supplement the author's writing. But in the digital realm, this supplementary material might also include hyperlinks, audio, and video as well.

This will fundamentally change the reading experience for you because online reading can be interactive in a way that a print book can't. An online environment allows you to work and play with content rather than passively absorbing it. Finally, when you read in print, you generally read sequentially, from the first word to the last. Maybe you'll flip to an index or refer to a footnote, but otherwise the way you read is fairly consistent and straightforward. Online, however, you can be led quickly into an entirely new area of reading by clicking on links or related content. Have you ever been studying for class and fall down a Wikipedia rabbit hole while looking for unfamiliar terms? You might have started by investigating the French Revolution, but half an hour later you find yourself reading about the experimental jazz scene in 1970s New York. You can't really do that with a book. Now that you've heard about how reading online differs from reading print, you should know that this has some really practical consequences for reading comprehension; how to understand and apply what you're reading. Improving your online reading comprehension will save you time and frustration when you work on your assignments. You'll be able to understand your course subject matter better, and your performance on your quizzes and exams will improve.

Click on these three bubbles to find out more about the "why, what, and how" of reading comprehension.

"Why am I being asked to read this passage?" In other words, what are the instructions my professor has given me? "What am I supposed to get out of this passage?" That is, what are the main concerns, questions, and points of the text? What do you need to remember for class?

"How will I remember what I just read?" In most cases, this means taking notes and defining key terms. When you keep the "why, what and how" of reading comprehension in the forefront of your mind while reading, your understanding of the material will improve drastically. It will only take a few minutes but it will not only help you remember what you've read, but also structure any notes that you might want to take. Let's put this information to use with a short exercise.

Imagine that your instructor has asked you to create an argument either for or against the institution of the death penalty in California. She has pointed you to the website www.deathpenalty.org to get started, and this is what you see/find. What terms or headlines stick out at you so you can begin crafting your argument?

This article will have a legal argument from a federal judge—a fantastic place to get talking points for your own argument. Hmm... this doesn't seem to be the best option for your argument because it's not directly related to your argument.

Let's skip or skim this one! This will give you historical precedent you can point to in your argument. Yes. A great rhetorical tactic is to use an anecdote from the life of a person with experience with the issues you're talking about, and this sounds like it might be very moving. After all, it was convincing enough to change this man's mind about the death penalty—maybe it would sway your audience as well.

What's more convincing than numbers, especially when it comes to the will of the American people? This article may give you a great point of counterattack if your argument is against the death penalty. This is another good testimony from someone affected by the death penalty, but it's in the form of a blog post, so there's probably better evidence out there.

(Question) I'm so used to reading printed texts, and I actually prefer it because I don't get distracted as easily as I do when I'm online. So how can I keep myself from getting distracted when reading online? (Answer) When you read online, the hyperlinks, images, audio, and video interactivity embedded in the text can be a really tempting distraction. Try reading a passage straight through at least once without clicking on any of the hyperlinks or participating in any of the interactive opportunities. First, get a basic "feel" for the passage, then read it with the interactive components to augment your reading.

(Question) I once had a teacher who didn't want us use our phones to read our assigned texts. Why did she care? (Answer) She's probably right. It's best not to read your assignments from the small screen of a smart phone. It's too easy to miss words and meanings when the reading process itself is challenging.

(Question) You've talked a lot today about comprehension, but I'd really like to know how I can improve my online reading speed. Got any tips? (Answer) So glad you asked! Reading quickly and efficiently will leave you more time to study, and improve your performance in your course. To read more quickly and efficiently online, try most of all to avoid distractions like ads, pop-ups, or hyperlinks that will lead you away from your assignment. Another tactic you can try is to scan the page before actually reading, focusing on key words and phrases rather than every single word. This is the same technique you just tried out in the death penalty exercise we went through. It will not only help you to read faster, it'll also give you a sense of the text's main ideas.

Bravo! You've now successfully completed the Online Reading Strategies module! Remember, most of what you do in an online class will be structured around reading. Don't you feel ahead of the game now?