

How to Guide: Reading for Meaning

Reading academic texts in A level subjects is not like reading fiction for pleasure. Whilst it is possible to do the subject without encountering primary texts there is sometimes no substitute for actually engaging with what the author says rather than hearing it second hand from an A level textbook, a revision guide or your teacher's verbal explanation. Students that get high grades read things other than the things the teacher gives in class.

Before you begin

1. If you have a larger volume in front of you, it is worth skimming the book and looking at contents pages or indexes at the end to check that what you are reading is going to help you.
2. You will probably need to **concentrate more** (turn off Youtube!) and will **read more slowly** perhaps a paragraph or even a sentence at a time.
3. It can be helpful to have an idea of the context and an overview of the article. An internet search of the author and the book/article will give you an overview of what to expect - it isn't cheating

Reading the text

1. Reading at A level (and beyond) needs to be active rather than passive. Have a notebook to hand or a word document open so that you can jot down key ideas as you read.
2. If there are subheadings or sections it can be worth skimming these so that you know what to expect. **Looking at the first paragraph and the conclusion** will help you to see where the author is going.
3. **Sometimes it is worth reading the article twice.** The first time through getting a general overview, not worrying about the detail, and simply getting the gist of what is being said. The second time going more carefully taking it a section at a time.
4. As you read through in detail focus on 'signposts' that indicate what the text is about. Use a dictionary to look up words you don't understand. There will be words you don't understand - it's not just you.
5. **Using a highlighter** on a copy of the text **or annotating a paragraph** as you go may also help.
6. Use argument maps (in philosophy) or other visual means where you can to show the author's structure.
7. At the end of each paragraph ask yourself what the key point of that paragraph is if you had to summarise it in a sentence. **Your one sentence summaries of paragraphs are the basis of your notes on the text.** - this helps you to precis the text (rewrite key points briefly in your own words)
8. **Add to your notes any direct quotes** that seem important to the author in showing what they are trying to say.

And after

1. You may need to review your notes afterwards to check you have got the key ideas. Ask yourself questions as you do so. What do I think of this idea? What might support this view? How would someone criticise this?

Bibliography

M. Lacewing 'Philosophy for AS and A Level'

<https://www.hoddereducation.co.uk/media/Documents/Downloads/Study-Skills-Booklet.pdf>