Skimming

The Learning Center at UNC-CH

Advantages

Processing

Skimming forces you to differentiate main ideas from support.

Preview, Review, Overview

Skimming provides an introduction to a text.

Skimming before class improves listening and note-taking.

Skimming after reading helps you recall content and structure.

Time Management

Skimming is an efficient way to refresh your memory of large amounts of material before an exam.

Skimming saves time when gathering and evaluating research material.

Disadvantages

Since you're skipping material, you're also missing content. Supporting detail and elaboration are important for comprehension.

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What Is Skimming?

Skimming is a strategic, selective reading method in which you focus on main ideas or specific topics. During the search, you deliberately skip text that provides details, stories, data, examples, or other elaboration. You extract the essence or "gist" of the author's message rather than the finer points.

Why Skim?

Sometimes we only need the "big picture" or main points when we're reading, not the details. Knowing when and how to skim will help you become a more efficient, strategic reader. You'll be able to preview and review vast amounts of material quickly.

Methods

Wheat vs. Chaff

Read only the amount of text necessary to determine if a section presents a main idea or *support* for a main idea.

Beginnings & Endings

Read first and last sentences of paragraphs.

Read first and last paragraphs of major sections.

Read introductions and summaries of chapters.

Visual & Verbal Cues

Watch for signal words and phrases that indicate an author's direction (e.g., *however, although, moreover, in addition to*).

Pay attention to proper nouns, enumerations, and words and phrases that appear in bold, italics, color, or special sections.

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