Reading Strategies for International Students

[Note: L1=First language, L2= Second language.]

Pre-reading Stage: This is the stage that introduces you to the reading material. Consider what type of reading it is (e.g. textbook, article, business case, etc.) and what reading strategies you will use.

- Have a **purpose** for reading in mind.
    - to read selective portions to clarify lecture points <u>or</u>
    - to read thoroughly to reinforce concepts and supporting details and/or learn material not covered in class
    - Ask yourself: What do I need to know from this reading?
    - Set yourself reading questions.

- **Preview** the content.
    - Read title (if a complex journal title, decode it)
    - In textbooks, read chapter objectives (or outline), summary and study guide questions
    - In journal articles, check the abstract for the hypothesis/thesis and the final paragraph for major findings. What evidence will be necessary to prove this hypothesis/thesis?

- Note what you already know about the topic, i.e. **background knowledge** (include L1 knowledge).

- Preview **new vocabulary**.
    - Make list(s) of key words that are new to you
    - Build lists around topics or chapters
    - Look up selected words in the dictionary *before* reading

- Turn **headings** into questions.
    - E.g.   <u>Heading</u>: Limitations of <u>F</u>iscal <u>P</u>olicy
      <u>Question</u>: What are the limitations of F.P.?
      Other possible types of questions:
        - What are the causes of...?
        - What are the characteristics of...?
        - ...effects of...?
        - ...differences from...?
        - ...outcomes of...?

- Make note of any pictures, illustrations, charts or summary diagrams.

Reading Stage: This is the stage at which you focus on the information to meet your reading needs and the details to answer your reading questions.

- Read a section then pause to reflect and see if you can answer reading questions (sections should not be too small e.g. paragraphs or a page vs. individual sentences)
- As you read, differentiate between main ideas and supporting details (between facts, opinions and examples)
- When you encounter unknown words:
  - Guess word meanings as you go - add unknown words to vocabulary list(s) (you can create separate lists for discipline specific words and general vocabulary words) - look these up later

  OR

  - Get meaning from context
    E.g. With the large amount of traffic travelling back and forth, I searched for a more <u>secluded</u> road.
    - Definition: secluded - hidden away or not easy to find
    - Meaning in this sentence: a road not travelled by many people
    - Clue words: large amount, traffic, searched for
  - Use dictionary only when you can't predict word meanings and you can't skip over them and still understand the passage

- Stop and check (at the end of a section)
  - Paraphrase (restate ideas in own words in L2, out loud or in your mind)
  - If highlighting key points or making brief margin notes, do so selectively
  - Review unclear concepts (but limit rereading of passages)

Post-reading Stage: This is the stage for making summary notes on the reading (if needed), analysing the reading and answering questions on the reading to test your understanding and recall.

- Make a brief written outline *in English,* if needed (i.e. if you will be tested on details from the reading that are not already contained in your lecture notes)
  - Group details under headings
  - Use words and phrases instead of writing full sentences
  - Use short forms e.g. <u>T</u>ime <u>M</u>anagement = TM
  - Paraphrase causality using arrows or flow charts
    E.g. expressing feelings >> better chance of recovery
  - Avoid re-copying phrases/passages directly from the text/article

- If you feel overwhelmed by details, think of categories for the details
    - E.g. In Geology, you are less likely to be asked to remember every single type of rock, than you are to know characteristics of groups of rocks, such as igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic.

- Link what you have learned from the chapter/article to what you already knew in L1. Think: What am I most likely to be asked on this chapter/article? Add to your reading questions if necessary.

- Answer your reading questions, learning objective questions and any recommended text questions. Use new vocabulary - in paraphrasing, in discussions, in writing.

- Ask yourself: Do I need to seek help with understanding any of the content?

- Reflect: Were my reading strategies effective for this reading?

REMEMBER: Focus your reading around objectives identified in the text, objectives your professor has given you or reading questions you have formed. Your goal in academic reading is not to read every word, but to identify and understand key concepts, be able to link examples to these, and compare, contrast, and evaluate ideas.