Reading Strategies for Graduate Students

Objectives:

- **Distinguish** graduate vs. general reading (volume, specialization, analysis, synthesis).
- **Match** reading strategy to purpose.
- **Apply** preview, skim, scan, careful/deep reading appropriately.
- **Manage** uncertainty (guess, park, move on) to keep momentum.
- **Capture** purposeful notes and **paraphrase** ethically.
- **Plan** a focused, goal-aligned 20–30-minute reading session.

A. Determine your reading purpose

Use your course learning outcomes, assignment prompts, or research questions to decide what you need from the text.

Template (finish the sentence):

As I read, I will focus on _____ so that I can _____.

Examples of purposes: understand a concept; extract methods; compare findings; gather evidence; prep for teaching; draft literature review.

B. Pre-reading / Previewing

- Scan metadata: title, authors, venue, date; look for signals of discipline and methods.
- Read abstract or executive summary; note research question and main results.
- Glance through headings/subheadings; read first/last sentence of sections.
- Check figures/tables and their captions to preview argument/evidence.
- Activate prior knowledge: list 3 things you already know + 2 questions you have.

C. Choose your reading approach

Match the approach to your goal. Use all three in sequence when needed.

Approach	Use it to…	How (quick cues)
Skim	Get the gist / map structure	Read titles, abstract, first/last sentences; glance at visuals
Scan	Find specific info	Search for keywords, data points, or argument moves
Careful reading	Analyze / evaluate	Annotate claims, evidence, methods; ask so-what / how-good

D. Know the structure (typical research article)

- Abstract • Introduction/Background • Literature Review • Methods • Results • Discussion/Conclusion • References • Appendix
- Where to look: claims often appear in the abstract, intro, and conclusion; details live in methods/results.

E. Guessing, tolerating uncertainty, and moving on

- Mark confusing spots (e.g., with "?") and guess the meaning from context.
- Note terms to revisit after the first pass; don't stall the whole session.
- Ask: Do I need this section for my purpose? If not, park it.

F. Taking notes & paraphrasing

Use brief, structured notes that you can drop into assignments later. Try one of these:

- Concept → Definition → Example → Source (page/section).
- Claim → Evidence → Method → Limitation → Relevance to my project.
- Pros/Cons table for methods or theories.

Paraphrase frame (2–3 sentences):

In this study, _____ argues/shows that _____.

Using _____, the authors find _____, which suggests _____.

For my project, this matters because _____.

G. Engage in deep reading (when it's worth it)

- Interrogate assumptions; compare with other literature; look for gaps.
- Connect what you read to what you know, feel, and need to do next.
- Build an annotated bibliography entry (Zotero/Mendeley/EndNote).

Design your next reading session

Goal (e.g., draft related-work paragraph / choose a method):

_____

Text & section(s):

_____

Time block (start/stop): _____ Location: _____

Approach: Skim (2–3 min) → Scan (5 min) → Careful reading (15–25 min)

Deliverable (what I'll produce): bullet list of 3 claims • 1 paraphrase • 2 citations • 1 question

Accountability: Who will I share this with (peer/class)?

_____

Practice prompts (build skill quickly)

- Purpose: From your syllabus, copy one learning outcome and write a reading purpose sentence that aligns with it.
- Skim/Scan: Take an abstract you're using; write a one-sentence gist, then list two outcomes/measures you scanned for.
- Careful reading: Highlight the author's main claim and one piece of evidence; write a two-sentence paraphrase.
- Uncertainty: Identify one confusing sentence; write your best guess + what evidence would confirm it.

Build a reading routine

1. Pick one text you need to read.
2. Set a purpose (e.g., prepare for discussion, extract methods, build a related-work paragraph).
3. Preview: titles/subtitles, abstract/summary, headings, first/last sentences, visuals/tables.
4. Do a 2-minute skim for the big idea, then a 3-minute scan for the 2–3 details you need.
5. Block one 20–30 minute careful-reading window to annotate only the relevant parts.
6. Write a 2–3 sentence paraphrase of the author's main claim + one implication for your project.