By this stage most students will have developed their own particular ways of reading. Many of you will enjoy the task of reading, some may not. The fact is though, that regardless of whether reading is enjoyable or not, you will be required to do a great deal of reading throughout your course; and your reading purpose will vary, depending on the material you are required to read. Hopefully, the following notes will assist you in reassessing and improving the way you read.

**We read for different reasons**

Sometimes we want to get only a general idea of what we are reading (for example, whether an advertisement is about a concert or a holiday excursion); sometimes we want to get some specific piece of information (for example, a time, a temperature, the name of a place); sometimes we want to understand absolutely everything that the writer has written (for example, the instructions for an exam or a laboratory experiment).

**We read in different ways**

We read in different ways depending on our reasons for reading. Skimming and scanning are two very important techniques of reading that we need to be able to use.

**Skimming - When do we skim?**

We skim when we want to get a general idea of a text before we read it in detail. We skim when we want to decide if a book or journal article or chapter in a book contains the sort of information that we are looking for.

**How do we skim?**

We move our eyes quickly. We try to get clues from the titles of articles and chapters and sections, from pictures and photos, from graphs and tables, from coloured and bold printing. We look especially at the first paragraph in the text, because it is often a general introduction.

We look especially at the first one or two sentences in each paragraph, because they often announce what the paragraph is about.

**Scanning - When do we scan?**

We scan when we are looking for specific pieces of information. We scan when we are trying to answer questions like:

- *What temperature should the kiln be operating at?*
- *By which date must the audit be completed?*
- *Is DC or AC current used?*

**How do we scan?**

We move our eyes quickly over the whole page, sweeping from side to side and from top to bottom. We look for dates, times, units of measurement, and key words connected to the question we are trying to answer. If you had to answer the question, *What is the most common form of cancer affecting Australians today?*, you would scan, looking for words which describe illness or parts of the body or organs of the body.

**Active Reading**

You cannot understand what you are reading if you simply sit and look at the page. You have to interact with the text if you are going to get the meaning that the writer is trying to get across. You have to read actively: this is vital for effective reading! (Overleaf, we’ll present a method of active reading, . . )
SQ3R

This is a method of active reading. The sections below explain it.

“Survey” means almost the same as “Skimming” (see above). Before you start to read an article or a chapter about a topic, try to remember what you already know about that topic. Skim over the text first to get a general idea of what it is covering. Check to see when it was written and who wrote it. Try to guess why they were writing and for whom they were writing. Ask yourself if you have seen the same topic discussed by other writers and try to remember what the other writers said.

Question. Set yourself questions which you hope the text will answer. For example, if the title of a journal article or chapter in a textbook is ‘Growth in the Australian Economy 1983 – 1996’, you might ask Why did the writer choose those dates? or What was the main cause of growth in the Australian economy in this period?. Setting yourself questions like these helps you to concentrate on what you are reading.

Read. Read through the material at a comfortable speed. If what you are reading belongs to you, highlight or underline the parts that you think are important as you read. (But: Don’t mark library books!)

Recall. Close the book or journal and try to jot down the main points of what you have just read. Do this as soon as you have finished reading. Check the text to see if you have forgotten anything important.

Review. Look over your notes after you have made them. If you are reading to prepare for an exam, don’t leave your review until the night before. Test yourself to see if you can remember what you have noted down.

Speed Reading

Don’t worry if you read your textbooks and references much more slowly than you would read a newspaper or a novel. Most of the content is unfamiliar at the beginning and its concepts may not be easy to understand. There are a number of ways that you can use to read faster, but remember that it is useless reading quickly if you cannot understand or remember what you are reading.

You can read faster if you look at groups of words rather than individual words. If you look at each word on the page separately, it means that your eyes have to make many more movements, stopping and starting each time, and this slows them down. If your eyes can take in several words or a whole line at a glance, they move much faster. You can practise reading by fixing your eyes at the same place in each line and moving them straight down the page.

We also slow our reading down if we let our eyes move backwards and forwards over the page. You can train your eyes to move forward steadily by moving a ruler down the page, covering what you have already read forcing your eyes to move ahead of it.

You can also read against the clock the way an athlete runs. Using the same book, you can force yourself to read a page in a shorter and shorter time, but making sure that you understand what you read.

Critical Reading

Do not feel that you must agree with everything that you read. Writers often have particular positions which they want to persuade other people to accept. It would be unusual if everyone agreed with everything that is written in a book or journal article or newspaper article. Writers may present some facts and leave out others, or they may give only one side of an argument. As you read, you need to ask questions like:

Is this fact or opinion?
What evidence does the writer use to support opinions?
Does the writer ignore evidence that I know about?
What emotional language does the writer use?
Who does the writer agree with and who does he/she disagree with?

Asking questions like these will help you to develop your own opinion about what you read, and that is important.