



## Online Reading Strategies

In an online educational environment, you're probably going to do more reading than listening. You may do some of your reading in printed form—say, an assigned novel or textbook—but some of it might also be online in the form of a webpage.

Reading online isn't the same as reading in print, so you should practice some strategies that will improve your online reading comprehension and speed.

### Print vs. Online

Reading print sources is different from reading online in three main ways:

1. Print sources have generally been vetted by an editor or a publishing house, so you can assume the work is authoritative. However, when you read something online, it might have been written or posted by anybody. This means you may have to seriously evaluate the authority of the information you're reading. Pay attention to who wrote what you are reading—can you identify the author? What are his or her credentials?
2. In print, text may include pictures, graphics, or other visual elements. But in the digital realm, you may find hyperlinks, audio, and video, as well. This changes your reading experience because online reading can be interactive in a way that a print book can't. An online environment allows you to work and play with content rather than passively absorbing it.
3. In print, you generally read in order, from beginning to end. However, online you can be led quickly into an entirely new area of reading by clicking links or related content. Have you ever been studying online and fall down a Wikipedia rabbit hole? You can't really do that with a book.

### Why, What, How?

Now that you know how reading online differs from reading print, you should know that this has some really practical consequences for reading comprehension—how to understand and apply what you're reading. Improving your online reading comprehension will save you time and frustration when you work on your assignments. You'll be able to understand your course subject matter better, and your performance on your quizzes and exams will improve.

**Consider the "why, what, and how" of reading comprehension:**

**Why?** Why am I being asked to read this passage? In other words, what are the instructions my professor has given me?

**What?** What am I supposed to get out of this passage? That is, what are the main concerns, questions, and points of the text? What do you need to remember for class?

**How?** How will I remember what I just read? In most cases, this means taking notes and defining key terms.

When you keep the "why, what and how" of reading comprehension in the forefront of your mind while reading, your understanding of the material will improve drastically. It will only take a few minutes but it will not only help you remember what you've read, but also structure any notes that you might want to take.

## **Q&A**

- Q. I'm so used to reading printed texts, and I actually prefer it because I don't get distracted as easily as I do when I'm online. So how can I keep myself from getting distracted when reading online?
- A. When you read online, the hyperlinks, images, audio, and video interactivity embedded in the text can be a really tempting distraction. Try reading a passage straight through at least once without clicking on any of the hyperlinks or participating in any of the interactive opportunities. First, get a basic "feel" for the passage, then read it with the interactive components to augment your reading.
- Q. I once had a teacher who didn't want us use our phones to read our assigned texts. Why did she care?
- A. She's probably right—it's best not to read your assignments from the small screen of a smart phone. It's too easy to miss words and meanings when the reading process itself is challenging.
- Q. You've talked a lot today about comprehension, but I'd really like to know how I can improve my online reading speed. Got any tips?
- A. Reading quickly and efficiently will leave you more time to study, and improve your performance in your course. To read more quickly and efficiently online, try most of all to avoid distractions like ads, pop-ups, or hyperlinks that will lead you away from your assignment. Another tactic you can try is to scan the page before actually reading, focusing on key words and phrases rather than every single word. This is the same technique you just tried out in the death penalty exercise we went through. It will not only help you to read faster, it'll also give you a sense of the text's main ideas.

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