

Some tips for successful reading

- Review the learning guide for the section that you are going to read. Having the concepts fresh in your mind will make understanding the reading much easier.
- It takes patience to do this kind of reading. Expect to read each section more than once. Try to figure out what each sentence is saying before going on to the next. Once you've gone through each paragraph, reread it and see if you can put it all together. At the end of each section, stop and say to yourself, now, what did I just read? Write your notes as you go, and make sure to use your own words, not the exact words of the text! If you can't explain it to yourself, you don't understand it yet – go back and work on it some more.
- Notice of the structure of the text. The headings and paragraphs can help you break it up into manageable chunks and let you know what the main idea will be. Look for the main idea and supporting ideas in each paragraph. Look for words in bold print, notes at the side, and summaries which can help make sense of the text.
- If you come across words you don't know, look them up. If they are organic chemistry words, try the glossary at the back of the textbook. If they are regular English words, use a dictionary. Don't waste time guessing what something means when you could just look it up.
- Find a secluded spot and read out loud – this can help keep your mind focused, and brings the part of your brain in charge of interpreting speech into the effort. Try reading into a tape recorder and listening to the tape. You may also read the chapter out loud with another student and discuss what it means together. (If you do this, however, you must each write your own notes and response paragraph separately.)
- Pay attention to your environment. Is there too much noise or too many distractions? Is it too quiet? Are you sitting comfortably? Is it a good time of day for reading? Trying to read with the TV on, roommates joking around, babies crying, in dead quiet, in an uncomfortable position, or in the middle of the night can all hinder your efforts.
- Take breaks. According to Dr. Walker, your brain can only focus well on something for about 20 minutes. After that, it becomes difficult to concentrate and be productive. So don't try to read for more than 20 minutes without a break. Get up and walk around, get a drink, take out the garbage, do some dishes, play with your kids, run around the building, whatever. Just don't let your breaks take over your study sessions!
- If you are having a hard time concentrating because you keep thinking about other things, take out a sheet of paper and free write for 5 or 10 minutes about whatever you are thinking about. This can have the effect of emptying your brain onto the page, and helps get worries or basketball games or whatever off your mind so that you can concentrate. If you are worried about what you need to get done, make a list of everything you need to do and prioritize it. Having a plan can help you focus on one thing at a time.