# Chapter 4: Reading College Level Materials

There are four resources in this chapter:

* Warm-up, Work-out, Cool-down Reading Steps
* Matrix Notes
* Graphic Organizers
* Tips for Reading Novels
* Tips for Reading Essays and Popular Articles
* Tips for Reading Scholarly Articles

Warm-up, Work-out, Cool-down Reading Steps

Follow the steps below to increase your reading comprehension. The Warm-up, Work Out, Cool Down strategy works for most kinds of reading, but it is particularly useful for reading textbooks since it helps you notice textbook features. Textbook features are anything the authors have added to the textbook to make it easier for you to pick out main ideas—they include headings, subheadings, learning objective questions, review questions and illustrations.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **WARM UP** | **Pre-Read the entire chapter by**   * Read all the learning objectives * Read headings and subheadings * Determine how many sections a chapter has—use that information to break the chapter into “chunks” of 5-8 pages. * Look over graphics and pictures * Read review material at the end of the chapter   **Goal:** To get a good sense of what concepts and terms you will have to know, and what you will have to do with them i.e. will you need to understand the steps in a process? Understand the differences between two or more things? |
| **WORK OUT** | **Read the First Chapter Section**  **Step 1:** Pre-read just the first section of the chapter by doing the following:   * Turn headings and subheadings into questions * Re-read learning objectives JUST for that section * Decide what the section’s main purpose is . Below are possible purposes of textbook sections: * To compare and contrast two or more ideas, people. Evetns, etc. * To describe sthe steps in a process * To define something and/or give a history of it * To show multiple examples of something * Select a notetaking style that fits the purpose of the chapter section   **Goal:** To get the best sense possible of what you will learn in just that section, and to pick a notetaking style that will help you remember the concepts.  **Step 2**: Read the chapter section and take notes. Make sure your notes answer questions from the learning objectives, or the questions you made out of headings.  **Goal:** To take notes that contain the important information. |
| **COOL DOWN** | **Review the section before you move on by doing one of the following:**   * Answering the questions you made from the headings * Answering learning objective questions * Summarizing the chapter section by looking away from the text and explaining to yourself what you just read. * Deciding if anything confuses you and making a plan to resolve it * Thinking about how you might be tested over what you just read   **Goal:** To make sure you the best understand you can have of this section of chapter before moving on the next section of the chapter, and to make a plan to resolve any confusion you have. |

# The Matrix Notes

The matrix notes can help you decide what to take notes on. Below is a chart that shows you what should go in each column. After the chart is a blank chart you can complete for yourself. NOTE: it is often helpful to turn your digital document or paper notebook so it is in "landscape" format. If you love the matrix notes and want this to be your notetaking style from now on, it is possible to buy "landscape notebooks."

Chapter number and title: Heading: Pages:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Subheading | Terms and Facts | Concepts |
| Most textbook chapters are divided into sections that have headings and subheadings. Above, you wrote the heading. In this column, write the subheadings. | In this column, write down terms and definitions from this section that seem important to know. You can either:  Write the terms and definitions first prior to reading the section or write down the terms and definition as you come to them. Experiment with both ways to see what works for you.  Make sure you line up terms and facts and concepts with the subsection you got them from so when you study later, you can see what section or subsection a particular term came from. | In this column, write the concepts you are learning from this section. Here are three ways to do that:  **Method 1:**  Turn the heading you wrote in column 1 into a question. I.e if the heading is "How World War I started" change the heading into "How did World War 1 Start?"  **Method 2:**  See if your chapter has Learning Objective statements or questions-- you can usually find those in one of two places: a long list at the beginning of the chapter or at the beginning of each section.  **Method 3:**  Look at the chapter review at end. Sometimes they contain summaries about what you should have learned in the different sections of the textbook. |
| When you come to the next subheading, start a new box so that it will be clear which terms and concepts came from which section. |  |  |

# Graphic Organizers

Sometimes it is easier to take notes on reading using graphic organizers-- which are simple charts and pictures. The advantage to graphic notes is that you can sometimes see relationships between ideas that aren’t clear from notes that are taken in a regular paragraph format.

## Cause/Effect Chart

Sometimes it is important to understand what thing or things caused something else to happen. How did one event or idea lead to another? How does a virus cause disease? How does a recession affect shopping habits? What weather conditions cause tornadoes? Here is a way to take notes when it seems the main point is to help you understand how one event led to another.

|  |
| --- |
| Cause(s): |
| Effect(s): |
| Why it matters: |

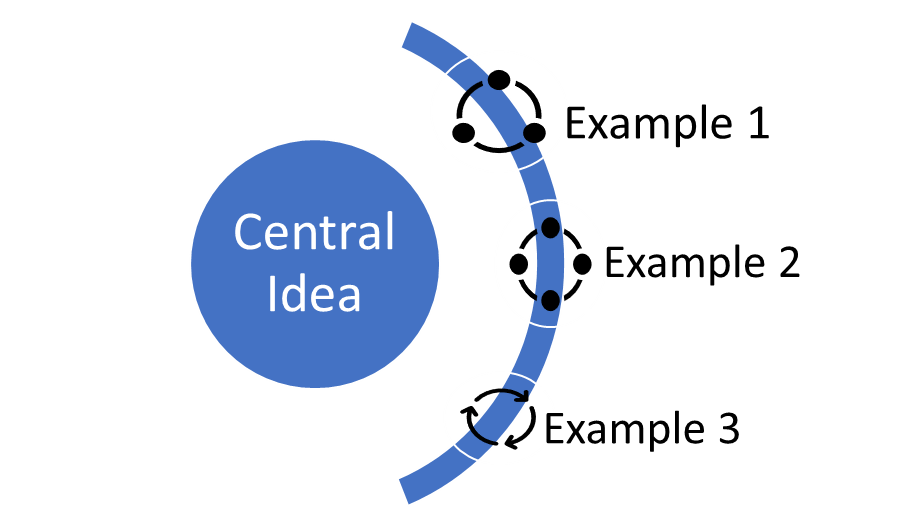
## Compare/Contrast Chart

Sometimes, a major goal is to compare two or more people, places, ideas, events or processes. A T-graph allows you to compare two or more things side-by-side so it is easier to keep similarities and differences straight. Just add more columns the more things you need to compare or contrast.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Person, Place, Idea, Event or Process 1 | Person, Place, Idea, Event or Process 2 |
| In the box, list the characteristics of the person, place, idea, event or process so you can see how they are different from and similar to the person, place, idea, event or process in the next column.  Highlight similarities in one color so you can tell at a glance what the two things have in common. |  |

## Examples or Types Concept Map

If it seems important to understand that there are multiple types of or examples of something-- i.e. multiple types of volcanos, several types of clouds, a number of ways to set up a business, it might be easiest to take notes in a concept map. A concept map allows you to put a central idea in the middle (i.e. "types of volcanos") and in bubbles around that center, you would name and describe each type of volcano.



## Steps In a Process

Sometimes the goal of a reading is to help you understand a process-- how a cell divides, or blood pumps through the heart. The process a bill takes to become a law, how to calculate the slope of a line. A time-line chart can help you remember the steps in a process, or the steps leading up to an event. The timeline can be vertical or horizontal, and you can include as many or as few steps as you need.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Step1 | Step 2 | Step 3 | Step 4 | Step 5 | Step 6 | Step 7 | Step 8 | Step 9 | Step10 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

## Who/What/When Chart

If you are learning history, or any other subject where people are doing things, consider taking notes in a who/what/when graph. Who/what/ When graphs can also be useful when you are trying to keep track of characters in a novel.

You can add, delete or change the questions in any way that suits your subject.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Who | What | Where | When | How | Why | Who Cares? |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

## Tips for Reading Novels

If you have been assigned a novel, usually it is because the things that happen to the characters in the novel relate in important ways to concepts you are learning in the class. For example, if you are in an African American History course, you might read a novel about an African American family who lived during the Civil Rights movement so you can see how the Civil Rights movement affected that family.

How to Read Books: Novels or Non-Fiction

**Step 1:** Read the syllabus and all assignments related to the novel. Even if your first writing assignment about the novel isn’t due for several weeks, read it anyway. Why? Because the assignment will give you clues about what to notice when you read the novel. Let’s say, in your Psychology class, you are reading a novel about a woman who suffers from major depressive disorder. One of the points of the class is that people with mental illnesses experience barriers to getting help and that society can and should do a better job of removing those barriers.

Even though the assignment over the book isn’t due for three weeks, you read it and here is the prompt for the paper you have to write: “In the novel, the main character, Lydia, suffers from depressive disorder. In this class, you are learning about common barriers people with mental illnesses face to receiving treatment. Select three barriers our character faces, describe them, explain why they are common barriers and suggest ways to overcome them.”

Now you know what to mark, underline and note when you read in the novel– the barriers to receiving treatment.

**Step 2:** Develop a notetaking system. Usually, for novels, simply underlining or highlighting important passages is good enough, but in a 328-page novel, how are you supposed to remember where you underlined what? Here is a simple way to do it:

Fold a sheet of paper in half so it fits in the book. Clip a pen to it and use the pen/ paper as a bookmark. Set up the piece of paper something like this:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Chapter/ page** | **Brief summary of action** | **Connection to important concept** |
| chapter 3 page 51 | Lydia tells co-worker she has from depression and co-worker tells her to cheer up and look on the bright side of things. | One barrier we are learning about is people don’t understand depression and say things that make it seem people can “snap out of it.” |

Try to write briefly so you don’t overwhelm yourself with information. If “Brief summary of action” and “Connection to important concept” are not good column headings for your class, replace them with headings that fit better.

Most instructors are happy to help students study and do homework more effectively. Consider showing your notetaking system to your instructor to see what they think of it. They may have some really great suggestions.

**Step 3:** As you get closer to the assignment you need to write, sort out your evidence. Go through what you have written on your sheet of paper and put stars next the “evidence” you think will relate most closely to the assignment you need to do.

## Tips for Reading Essays and Popular Articles

As a rule, the author of an essay wants to get readers to understand their viewpoint and/ or connect with them emotionally. The goal of an article is to inform readers about an event, situation, person or idea. Both essays and articles might try to persuade people to take an action, or to convince them of something.

Unless an essay or article is really long, try to simply take notes on the document itself– i.e. write in the margins or on sticky notes you place next to information you want to mark. If the essay or article is in electronic form and you don’t want to print it, see if you can use an online note-taking app of some kind.

**Step 1:** As you read the essay or article, mark the following types of information:

1. Things that confuse you (places where you aren’t sure what the point is)
2. Places where it seems the author is making an important conclusion
3. Places where it seems the author is justifying or providing reasons for their conclusion
4. Any sentences that give you clues about the structure of the article. Below are examples:

* Number sentences:  i.e. “There are three reasons by we should change XYZ law . . . .” Sentences like this tell readers that the author will likely list and discuss each reason.
* Comparison sentences: “Similar to,” “different from” or “There are important similarities/ differences between X and Y” indicate that an author’s purpose is to compare and contrast two or more things.
* Cause/ Effect: “X caused Y” or “X led to Y . . .” shows that the author’s purpose is to show how one thing caused another.
* Process: “The first step is to . . . . .” or “The first thing that needs to happen is  . . .”indicates that the author wants you to understand process.

1. Anything that reminds you of another source you are reading for class
2. Anything that touches you personally because you can relate to it

**Step 2:** Come up with a color coding or symbol system for each type of information above. For instance, if something confused you, put a question mark by it. If something seems to be an important conclusion, write “conclusion” beside it, etc. Or, if you like colors, highlight all confusing things in yellow, all conclusions in pink, etc.

**Step 3:**When you are done reading the essay or article ask yourself this question: “What major conclusion or conclusions does this author come to?” and/or “What do they want to persuade readers to believe or do?”

Once you’ve answered the question that seems the best fit for your article, make a list of reasons why you believe this is the author’s main conclusion. Here is a made-up example: let’s say you read an article that makes the point that American school lunches are very unhealthy compared to the school lunches offered in other parts of the world and that has led to a series of health and behavior issues for school children. You could write something like this:

*Main Conclusion*: American School lunches are unhealthy compared to many other countries and this has led to health issues.

*Reasons the author gives to support this conclusion:*

1. America spends less on school lunches than other countries, which results in low quality foods high in fat, sugar and salt.
2. American children have higher rates of obesity than children in other countries.
3. American children suffer in greater numbers from behavioral problems than children in other parts of the world.
4. These behavior problems can be linked to diet.

## Tips for Reading Scholarly Articles

Scholarly articles have unique features and a unique function. As you already learned, they are hard to read because they are written for a professional audience. However, it helps to read these challenging articles if you understand how they work. Scholarly articles have a certain structure—and you can use it to help you figure out what the article is doing. In the next pages, you will read about the structure of these articles as well as suggestions about how to read each part.

The first step in successfully reading a scholarly article is to give yourself enough time. Even a short scholarly article might take longer to read than you think it will. If you think you can read a scholarly article in just an hour or two, rethink that. Give yourself opportunities to read the article in stages, and even read it multiple times.

**Parts of a Scholarly Article**

**Most scholarly articles have distinct parts. Some common parts are:**

1. **The title**
2. **The abstract**
3. **The introduction**
4. **Descriptions of studies**
5. **Discussion/ Conclusion**

**Step 1: Read the Title**

Scholarly articles sometimes have long titles and words you don’t know. If you don’t know the words in the title, look them up—and make sure to read all the definitions of the word since sometimes a word means something in “regular English” but something else in a scholarly article.

Next, re-write the title in “plain English.”

**Step 2: Read the Abstract**

Most scholarly articles have an abstract– a paragraph-long summary at the very beginning of the article. It is labelled “abstract.” It includes information about what the authors hoped to learn, how they went about learning it and what their major conclusions were. The reason authors write abstracts is so that other researchers can read that one paragraph and decide whether or not they want to read the entire article.

Read the abstract, and when you are done, do the following:

1. Make a statement about what you will learn in the article
2. Write two questions you expect/hope the article will answer
3. Write down between 1 and 5 words you think you need to know the definition of in order to understand this article
4. If possible, compare your ideas about what will be in the article with a classmate.

**Step 3: Read the Introduction**

Most scholarly article have an introduction—and the point of the introduction is usually to do two things:

1. Summarize a bunch of research on the topic. The author of the article does this so you can see them as an expert who has done a lot of research, and also to sum up in a few pages what the current research on that topic is.
2. Explain why the scholarly article you are reading is important. Authors usually write something to help you understand how their article fits into the research. For example, let’s say that you are reading an article written by authors who are researching how social media affects children. Let’s say the researchers notice there is a ton of research about how social media can harm teen girls’ self-images, but they notice very little research has been done on younger children, so they have decided to study girls who are 8-10 years old. They will explain in their introduction that their research matters because it focuses on a group that has not been studied very much.

Do the following while you read the introduction:

* Underline or highlight three to five things you find interesting
* Put a star next to three to five sentences/ paragraphs you think get at a main idea
* Mark ANY words, sentences, phrases, etc. that help you understand the article’s purpose or help you understand the structure of the article. Here are examples of what to look for:
* Sentences that give numbers: i.e. “There are three reasons why XYZ happens . . . “ or “this research explores the four reasons why students prefer online learning.”
* Sentences that suggest a shift in thought: i.e. “For decades, educators have believed that suspending students is an effective way to punish them, but new research proves that it is harmful to students.” Or “The idea behind suspending students is that suspension will make them want to behave better, however, the opposite is often true.” Words to look for include “but,” “however,” “in conclusion,” “on the contrary,” “on the other hand,” “in addition to.”

**Step 4: Read the Rest of the Article**

Let’s pretend you are reading an article called “Rethinking School Suspension: Is the Punishment Worse Than the Crime?” The author of the article is arguing that suspending students from school is not a good way to punish misbehaving students. (Note: while there maybe research on this topic, this particular article is made up). There are three basic ways scholarly articles can be structured and they are described below:

* Describes **qualitative**studies the author(s) did themselves—Qualitative means that the author relies on non-numerical information (interviews, open-ended survey questions, journal entries written by the people who are being studied, observations) to make a conclusion or recommendation. If the author of our fictional article on school suspension interviewed suspended students or the educators who suspended them, that would be an example of a qualitative study. As you examine your article, does it seem the author relied on interviews or open-ended survey questions?
* Describes **quantitative** studies the author(s) did themselves. Quantitative means numbers. If the author focuses on quantitative research, they will determine what percentage of students who are suspended a certain number of days out of the school year earn low GPA’s, or don’t graduate from High School at all. They might even explore if students who end up on suspension go on to get into more serious trouble, and, if so, what percentage and what kind of trouble. As you read your article, do you see lots of statistics? Some scholarly articles have several pages of data. If you haven’t had statistics, you won’t understand it. Don’t stare at it endlessly—staring at data won’t make it clearer. Get what you can out of it and move on.
* **Summarizes** a ton of research done by others, then makes a recommendation. Some scholarly articles don’t contain any studies the authors did themselves—rather, they use research already done. For example, a scholarly article about why suspending misbehaving students is a bad idea will summarize many articles or studies that explain why suspension harms students and how other ways of dealing with misbehaving students is better. If an article has summaries of other people’s research, it is called a **literature review**, which might be a confusing term since you probably associate literature with novels, poems and short stories.

Look through your article and decide if it seems to be mostly qualitative, quantitative or a summary. After reading it, what does the author basically seem to be saying?

**Step 5 Read the General Discussion**

At the end of the article, you will see a heading that might say “Discussion” or “Conclusions” or “Recommendations.” These sections of the article sum up the author(s) main points. Here is the type of information you will find in these sections:

* Major conclusions of the research or experiments
* Things the author(s) would do differently if they had an opportunity to do more research or do the experiment again.
* Explanations of how this article fits into what else is being said about this topic. For example, if authors researched how nitrates affect ponds in northern Minnesota, but in their research, they find that most studies focus on lakes, they would explain that their research adds to our understanding of nitrates in different kinds of water sources.
* Ideas the author(s) have about what should be done now that we know what we know. For example, if authors were researching why students don’t complete college and 60% of non-completers they interviewed said they would have continued with college if they had more money, then the authors might recommend that schools do a better job helping students understand and get financial aid.

As you read these last paragraphs of the article, write down five statements/ conclusions the author(s) is making about this topic. If it helps, think of it like this: If you had to summarize the main ideas of this article for someone who hadn’t read it, what would you say?