

DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AND GENERAL STUDIES
GEN 103 STUDY SKILLS

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Listening, Taking notes, Reading.

Introduction

Recap: Problems of studying

Some of the problems you may face in learning:

- i. inability to follow lectures
- ii. inability to take down notes
- iii. lack of concentration
- iv. slow reading
- v. reading and not understanding
- vi. too many things to read
- vii. clumsy and congested time-table
- viii. reading but not able to put things down properly during examination.

If we go by the problems listed above as the difficulties we have in studying, it is obvious that we need certain skills for studying. Can you think about some of these skills?

Some of the skills are *listening, note taking, reading and writing*. These may sound pretty basic, whatever level you're at; but a well-skilled student can consciously adopt different reading and writing styles or note-taking formats to suit the context. These are called **interactive learning skills**. Let's take these skills one by one. The first is listening.

I. LISTENING SKILLS

"We were given two ears but only one mouth, because listening is twice as hard as talking."

Gaurav Misra LISTENING SKILLS- Active & Passive Listening

Listening is an important component of learning. As a student you need to do a lot of listening. Some of these are:

- i. listening to lecturers
- ii. listening to colleagues during group discussions
- iii. listening to cassette tapes
- iv. listening to video tapes
- v. listening to CD-ROM
- vi. listening to films, radios, TV, etc.

Why do you do all this listening?

- a. to obtain information.
- b. to understand.
- c. for enjoyment.
- d. to learn.

We must distinguish between hearing and listening. Hearing is involuntary, usually unconscious; so long as the auditory organs are functioning normally we will hear sounds.

Listening: most definitions of listening include “paying attention to, giving attention to, making an effort to hear, attending closely with the ears for the purpose of hearing”. Listening therefore involves making a deliberate and conscious effort to focus the mind on the sounds. We can give full attention to what we listen to, or we can just listen without fully focusing the mind on what we hear. The first type is active listening and the second type is passive listening.

Passive Listening

Passive listening is not much different from hearing. We do not concentrate our minds on what we hear. Listening to music for relaxation, or enjoyment, is a good example of passive listening. One may choose not to pay attention to the lyrics, or may not even understand the language, but still enjoy the rhythm or melody. Also many of us have found ourselves in situations where our minds would drift, we would lose our motivation in listening, and consider the information we hear as "a background noise" or pretend that we're listening just "to be polite." We think that we are listening, but in fact we are simply letting this information go past our brain. That also is passive listening.

Active listening

Active listening is the act of mindfully attending to and attempting to comprehend the meaning of words spoken by another in a conversation or speech.

Active Listening is the single most useful and important listening skill. In active listening we are also genuinely interested in understanding what the other person is thinking, feeling, wanting or what the message means, and we are active in checking out our understanding before we respond with our own new message. We restate or paraphrase our understanding of their message and reflect it back to the sender for verification. This verification or feedback process is what distinguishes active listening and makes it effective.

Active listening implies listening with a purpose. We listen to gain information from the speaker, not just to "fill in the awkward silence." When listening actively, we obtain directions, pay attention to details, solve problems, get to know people, share interests, feelings, emotions, etc. In active listening we engage ourselves into the message that we hear, interact with it, pay attention to sounds, expressions, intonation, as well as take note of what we do not understand.

Becoming an Active Listener

These recommendations are most suitable for purposes of communication skills but we can apply some of the points to the lecture situation.

There are five key elements of active listening. They all help you ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they say.

1. Pay Attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message.

- Look at the speaker directly.
- Put aside distracting thoughts.
- Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations.
- "Listen" to the speaker's body language.

2. Show That You're Listening

Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.

- Nod occasionally.
- Smile and use other facial expressions.
- Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh.

3. Provide Feedback

Our assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.

- Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is," and "Sounds like you are saying," are great ways to reflect back.
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say." "Is this what you mean?"
- Summarize the speaker's comments periodically.
- Ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is XXX; is that what you meant?"

4. Do not be judgmental

- Do not find fault with the way a speaker looks, acts, and talks.
- Don't interrupt with counter arguments.
- Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.

5. Respond Appropriately

- Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him or her down.
- Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
- Assert your opinions respectfully.
- Treat the other person in a way that you think he or she would want to be treated.

<http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/ActiveListening.htm#sthash.WNgGHs4e.dpuf>

2. TAKING LECTURE NOTES

- After one day people typically remember about 54% of what they first heard.
- After 7 days the amount retained drops to 35% and after a month it drops further to 19 %.

This decline underscores the importance of performing daily and weekly reviews of lecture and reading notes as a means of keeping information fresh in your mind.

a. There are many reasons for taking lecture notes.

- i. Making yourself take notes forces you to listen carefully and test your understanding of the material.
- ii. Learning to make notes effectively will help you to improve your study and work habits and to remember important information
- iii. Personal notes are usually easier to remember than the text.
- iv. The writing down of important points helps you to remember them even before you have studied the material formally.
- v. Often, students are deceived into thinking that because they **understand** everything that is said in class they will therefore remember it. This is dead wrong! Write it down.

b. Speakers usually give clues to what is important to take down. Some of the more common clues are:

- i. Material written on the blackboard.
- ii. Repetition
- iii. Emphasis
 - a. Emphasis can be judged by tone of voice and gesture.
 - b. Emphasis can be judged by the amount of time the instructor spends on points and the number of examples he or she uses.
- iv. Word signals (e.g. "There are **two points of view** on . . . " "The **third** reason is . . . " " In **conclusion** . . . ")
- v. Summaries given at the end of class.
- vi. Reviews given at the beginning of class.

c. Each student should develop his or her own method of taking notes, but most students find the following suggestions helpful:

- i. Make your notes brief.
 - a. Never use a sentence where you can use a phrase.
 - b. Never use a phrase where you can use a word.
 - c. Use abbreviations and symbols, but be consistent.
- ii. Put most notes in your own words. However, the following should be noted exactly:
Formulas
Definitions
Specific facts
- iii. Use outline form and/or a numbering system. Indentation helps you distinguish major from minor points.
- iv. If you miss a statement, write key words, skip a few spaces, and get the information later.
- v. Don't try to use every space on the page. Leave room for coordinating your notes with the text after the lecture. (You may want to list key terms in the margin or make a summary of the contents of the page.)
- vi. Date your notes. Perhaps number the pages.

SAVING TIME ON NOTETAKING

Here are some hints regarding taking notes on classroom lectures that can save time for almost any student. Some students say that they plan to rewrite or type their notes later. To do so is to use a double amount of time; once to take the original notes and a second to rewrite them. The advice is simple: DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME!

- . *Don't write down everything that you read or hear. Be alert and attentive to the main points.*
- Use abbreviations and symbols to reduce the amount of writing you do. Develop a system that is meaningful to you, but be consistent,

"imp." for important.

"w/o" for without

"b/c" for because,

cf (compare),

ie (that is),

e.g.(for example),

w/ (with),

w/o (without),

&, + (and),

= (equals, is). (less than) <; greater than >

- Listen for key words, phrases, or lists. Words such as "effects," "factors," "reasons," "steps," "uses," "causes," or "characteristics" are just a few of the words that should grab your attention.
- Phrases like "you need to know this," "this will be on the test," "this is an important idea," "is defined as," or "remember this" should do likewise. Also listen for words that indicate order such as "first," "next," "also," or "finally".
- Organize your notes by blocking ideas, creating outlines, using indentations, drawing diagrams and charts, and making use of margins. As time goes on, you will develop a system that is meaningful to you.
- If you get behind, write in a keyword or phrase and leave a space. Later consult with the instructor, teaching assistant, or a friend to fill in the blank.
- After the lecture, take the time to review your notes. This method will give you time to flesh-out any gaps, and the review helps imbed the information more fully in your memory.
- Later on as you begin test preparation reduce these notes further into outlines, note cards, charts, and diagrams as a means of facilitating mastery.

Once you have a complete set of notes, commit the information to memory. When you review course material, you are trying to move the information from your short-term memory to your long-term memory. Typically, a person must deal with information at least three times in order to succeed in this process. If you don't engage in timely reviews, you remember less and less of the original information. This adds extra learning time, as you will need to re-expose yourself to material before the process can begin again.

The following are some helpful memory hints. They are designed to facilitate your handling of the material in a variety of ways. The key to memory is to engage in timely, multiple exposures of varying types.

Use mnemonic devices. When things need to stay in a particular order, mnemonics can be very helpful. Use the first letter of each item in the series as the basis for the word in a memorable phrase. For example, some of us learned to spell arithmetic by remembering, A Rat In The House Might Eat The Ice Cream.

Mnemonics

Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune

"My Very Eyes May Just See Under Nine Planets

"My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nachos"

"Mary's Virgin Explanation Made Joseph Suspect Upstairs Neighbor"-

The colours of the rainbow:

Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet.

"Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain" –

"Run over your granny because it's violent"

- **Review your notes**

Review your notes as soon as you can. Reviewing your notes directly following a lecture will make sure that (1) you understand your notes, (2) you understood the lecture and (3) it will help you to concrete in your mind the concepts and information you learned

3. READING

When you first come to University you may be a little shocked at the amount of reading that is required of you, usually in a short period of time. The important thing is not to get bogged down and feel overwhelmed by the material. You can avoid this by:

- selecting your reading material wisely
- keeping your purpose in mind as you read
- using different reading styles

- taking short breaks periodically

This section will introduce you to some different reading styles, and how to use them.

Adopting Different Reading Styles

Like listening, there are different ways or methods of reading. To be a really effective reader you need to be able to vary your style of reading. It's likely that you already do this instinctively to some extent. Consider how you would read:

- a blockbuster novel
- a newspaper
- a poem
- an instruction manual

When reading for pleasure, you may read quickly with few breaks and without worrying about having to recall details later. By contrast, when consulting an instruction manual you may read only one or two paragraphs, but you read them very carefully, making sure you understand the details.

When reading complex material, since your objective is to understand it as well as possible, you will need to adapt your reading style to this purpose.

The topics following sections introduce you to some recognised reading styles, so that you can be more aware of your own approach, and thereby improve your study strategies.

Reading Styles

Scanning

Scanning is what you do when you read very quickly for a specific piece information. For instance, when looking up a number in a phone book. Use headings and titles and formatting clues (e.g. bold text, indented quotations) on the page to help you home in on what you're looking for.

Don't try to read every word.

Skimming

The aim of skimming-is to get the general idea, gist or overview of a text and its content, not to have a detailed understanding of the text.

Use the Contents page to get an overview.

Read the first and last sentence of each chapter / section / paragraph to see where the text is going and what it's covering.

Passive Reading

Passive reading is effortless reading. When you pick up a magazine or a romance novel you want the words to be easy, and the action to be fast and exciting or relaxed and simple. You don't want to have to think too much. You just want to sit back, relax, and be entertained.

In "Passive reading" the deeper level of activity (such as looking for symbolism, or wondering what message the author is trying to convey to you) is not as intense as that of active reading.

When you read passively, you may not be taking away new ideas or opinions, but you are being entertained. Passive reading is really only as good as the material you choose to read.

Active Reading

To make the most of time you spend studying, you need to read actively. We've all sat at a desk at some point "reading" the same page over and over again, with very little of it going in. You could spend 8 hours a day like this in the library, and it might seem to you — and to every one else — that you are working really hard. But if your reading is passive — if you're not engaging intellectually with the material — your time will not have been well spent.

Active reading simply means keeping focussed on the material. It will mean your time spent reading is more efficient, and that you're more likely to remember what you've read afterwards.

Active reading will also help you to form your own opinions as you go along.

Active Reading

Active reading is reading something with a determination to understand and evaluate it for its relevance to your needs. Active readers usually engage with the content; such as underlining and highlighting main ideas. Passive readers only read through without the intent to retain or study the information. Simply reading and re-reading the material isn't an effective way to understand and learn. Actively and critically engaging with the content can save you time.

In order to read effectively, it is necessary for you to interact with whatever you are reading. Your mind is constantly in motion when you read.

To fully understand what you read, you complete tasks

- *Before you actually start to read a selection*
 - Get an overview of how the material is organized: scan the section for titles, headings, sub-headings, and topic sentences to get its general idea; pay attention to graphs, charts, and diagrams
 - Define a particular question or goal for your reading
 - Give yourself a set time-frame, i.e. "I will read this for an hour, and have clarified X"
- *During the reading of the selection*
 - Highlight or underline the key points (use post-its if you don't own the text)
 - Make notes in the margin, e.g. questions or points you'd add (use post-its if you don't own the text)
 - Stop for a short break if you're hungry/bored/in need of some fresh air
 - Make separate notes: see Note-taking.
 - Practice the "look-away method": periodically look away from the text and ask yourself a question relating to the text
- *After reading the selection*
 - Summarise what you have read, in your own words

In other words, you don't just pick up a book and read the words

{see Handout *Active vs. Passive textbook readers* .PDF}

Study Reading

SQ3R is a five-stage technique to aid reading comprehension.

It stands for: Survey - Question - Read - Recall - Review.

Survey

Examine the whole before you read the parts — survey the book first, then the chapter, then the paragraph.

- Read the title to know the subject
- read the introduction or summary to see what the author thinks are key points
- Notice the boldface headings to see what the structure is
- Notice any maps, charts or graphs.
- Notice the reading aids: italics, bold face, questions at the end of the chapter.
They are all there to help you understand and remember

Question

Ask yourself:

Why are you reading this? What do you already know? What do you want to know? What is new or interesting about this material? Does this support / supplement / contradict what I already know?

Try turning the title, headings, and/or subheadings into questions.

Read

Skim read at the first reading, looking for the main ideas and general structure of the text.

Only then read for the purpose of making notes on the key points.

Look for answers to the questions you first raised.

Reduce your speed for difficult passages — stop and re-read parts which are not clear.

Read only a section at a time and recite after each section.

Recall

Can I recall the key points without re-reading the text? Recall helps you to concentrate, and to make your reading active rather than passive.

Orally ask yourself questions about what you have just read and/or summarize, in your own words, what you read.

Take notes from the text but write the information in your own words.

Underline/highlight important points you've just read.

Use the method of recitation which best suits your particular learning style but remember, the more senses you use the more likely you are to remember what you read.

Triple strength learning: Seeing, saying, hearing

Quadruple strength learning: Seeing, saying, hearing, writing!!!

Review

Look back at the text to check your recall. Have you missed anything of importance?

Spotting Author's navigation aids:

In writing, as in speaking, writers give clues or signals to important information.

- Learn to recognize sequence signals, e.g.
“Three advantages of” or
“A number of methods are available...” leads you to expect several points to follow.

The first sentence of a paragraph will often indicate a sequence:

“One important cause of...”

“Another important factor....” and so on, until,
“The final cause of...”

Useful places to look in a book

1) Outside the main text

- *Content list/Table of Contents* – shows chapter headings and their page locations. (You will normally scan this to locate a chapter or section)
- *Guide to the User* (especially for Reference books) like an encyclopedia or dictionary. This informs the reader how the information has been packaged and explains the process of locating information easily.
- *Introduction/Preface/ Author’s or Publisher’s note*

These are usually the writer’s or editor’s summary of what the book is about, or the way the subject has been treated. It may usually include some useful background information.

- *Index* – This is an alphabetical list of every subject or name mentioned in the book and all pages in which the item is mentioned. The index is very useful for locating specific information without reading whole chapters. This is an example of a section of an index page from *Introduction to Human Communication*, Gibson and Hanna (19992: 475).

F

Facial expression, 104-5

Fallacies, 219-23

False authority, 222-23

Feedback

defined, 16-17

giving, 152-62

immediacy of, 118

importance of, 151-53

obtaining, 162-65

Feelings, *See also* Emotions

defined, 148

If you studying Human Communication or you are writing something on the subject and you need only the definition of “feedback”, which is an important element in the communication process, you can locate this specific information in the book on pages 16-17.

- *Reviews* of the book: This is usually an evaluation or appraisal of the contents of the book by a reviewer or reviewers. This will usually be on the jacket or at the back of the book.
- *Publisher’s blurb* – a short description of the contents of the book by the publisher; this may also be on the jacket.
- *b. Within the text*
- *Chapter headings and sub-headings*- surveying chapter headings helps you locate specific information.
- *Chapter introductions* – Introductions and summaries of chapters may explain what the chapter contains. The concluding part of the chapter may also sum up the main ideas discussed in it.

Bad Reading Habits and How to Break Them back

To really get rid of a bad habit, you should replace it with a good one. You have to want to get rid of the bad habits, and you must practice and work at it in order to change. The following are some of the bad habits which tend to cause people to read slowly. Ask yourself whether you are guilty of any of the following:

A. Moving your lips when you read

Moving your lips slows you to a fast talking rate, about 150 words per minute. Put your fingers on your lips to stop the motion.

B. Vocalizing

Vocalizing means you are pronouncing words in the voice box of the throat without making sounds. This also slows your reading rate to that of speaking. To check, rest your fingertips lightly against the vocal cord area of your throat. If you feel a vibration, or if you find that your tongue is moving, you are vocalizing.

C. Reading everything at the same speed

When reading set your rate according to your purpose for reading and the difficulty level of the material. Practice adjusting your rate to suit your material. The more difficult the material, the slower the rate.

D. Regressing out of habit

Regressing means rereading a word, phrase, or sentence out of habit and not because of need. Sometimes, it is necessary to reread something, especially in a difficult passage. But habitual, unnecessary regressing really slows you down. Use a card or paper to cover the text after you read it to prevent regressing.

E. Reading one word at a time

Do you think one word at a time, or in phrases? Slow readers tend to see only one word at a time. Good readers will see several words at a time and their eyes will stop only three or four times as they move across a page. Reading in idea-phrases speeds your reading and improves your understanding of what you have read. Mark the phrases in the sentences of a passage, then practice seeing more than one word at a time.

The best way to read faster is to practice reading just a little faster than is comfortable. Changing reading habits is not easy, after all you have been reading that way for many years. It takes several weeks of conscious effort in order to change bad reading habits.

References

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<http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills/essentials/reading/summary.html>