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Reading and note-taking

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Academic Reading

Can be daunting:

- Difficult to know **WHAT** to read.
- Difficult to know **HOW** to read.



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Reading lists

Q: Why do lecturers supply you with a reading list?

- a) To make sure you read every seminal work on your subject.
- b) In order to impress you with how much they've read.
- c) To offer you a jumping-off point for your own research.
- d) To encourage you to buy their books.



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Successful academic reading involves:

- Knowing WHY you are reading a text
 - Is it KEY?
 - Is it RECOMMENDED?
 - Is it SUPPLEMENTARY?

See resourcelists@bham ([link](#)) and general reading lists.



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Successful academic reading involves:

- Being selective in your reading:
 - Checking for relevance.
 - Checking for credibility.
- Understanding the text.
- Remembering key points from what you've read.



Know your purpose

Before you begin reading, ask:

- 'Why am I reading this?'
- 'What is the end goal?'
- 'What do I expect to find?'
- 'What do I expect to remember?'



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Survey the reading material

- Check the relevance of the title, index and contents – make sure the text covers the topics you require.
- Who are the authors? Are they known experts in the field? Do they have a particular perspective or bias?



Survey the reading material

- When was the text published? Is it out-of-date or still relevant to your project?

- Read to get clues about the content:
 - Abstracts.
 - Headings & subheadings.
 - First and last paragraphs or chapters.
 - Summaries.



Decide which reading technique is fit for your purpose

- Skimming
- Scanning
- Light reading
- Close reading



Skimming

- **Skimming** is a kind of 'scooting' across the 'surface' of a text, generally used to get a broad idea of what a text is all about. You therefore might want to skim read to see if a text is relevant to your interest or subject, to get an idea of how difficult the material is or to find out how much of it you may have to read closely at a later stage.



Scanning

- **Scanning** is what you do when you quickly examine part of a text for one or more specific items that you are interested in. For example you may scan a section of a book for a particular name. You should rapidly move across and down the text looking only for those words you are interested in - do not begin to read groups of words or sentences. Dates and names (beginning with a capital letter) are particularly easy to find using this method.



Light reading

- **Light Reading** is sometimes appropriate in studying. It is somewhere between skimming and close reading. It does not require full concentration and is often used to get a working knowledge of the contents of the text.



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Close reading

- **Close Reading** means reading in detail with full concentration. It means reading groups of words, but not mechanically, one at a time. Rather you should aim to read in such a way that the idea or information they convey is understood. You will find, as you practise this, that it is just an extension of the way in which you already understand written material.
- Another way of expressing this is to say that close reading is active reading. Concentration is required for close reading - but remember that the objective is understanding and not memorising.



Reading techniques activity

- Take a look at the handout.
- When you are asking one of the following questions, which is the most appropriate reading technique to use?



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Reading techniques activity

Answers

- Am I going to use this text for background reading, perhaps to 'fill out' my grasp of a subject?

- Light reading, do not make detailed notes, but just get the gist of the content.



Reading techniques activity

Answers

- Is this text essential reading and a key element of the course, essay or presentation?
- Careful and close reading, making detailed and full notes.



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Reading techniques activity

Answers

- Will it be enough to read a chapter(s) or part(s) of an article to get an overview of the material?
- Skim read, to get the gist of it.



Reading techniques activity

Answers

- Do I want to get an overview of the whole book?
- Look at chapter headings and the introduction and then skim read.



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Reading techniques activity

Answers

- Do I want to study a text intensely, to grasp all the main ideas and/or collect all the information?
- Looking, first at any chapter headings and introduction, skim through for an overview and then undertake close reading.



Reading techniques activity

Answers

- Do I need to find some specific pieces of information in a text?

- Scan the text to get the information you need.



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Reading techniques activity

Answers

- Despite undertaking Step 1 above am I still unclear how useful this text will be?
- Scan through the introduction, contents and index, and then decide on relevance.



Question what you are reading

Formulate 'priming' questions to interrogate the text:

- Break down an essay/assignment problem into smaller research questions.
- Brainstorm areas of curiosity.
- Make predictions: 'What do I expect to find...?'



Question what you are reading

Formulate 'priming' questions to interrogate the text:

- What do I already know about this topic?
- Can I make links?

Which of your surveyed texts is most likely to answer these questions?

New questions will occur while reading – write them down.



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While you are reading

- Don't rush – find a speed that allows you to best understand the text.
- Read difficult sections twice at normal speed (not once slowly).
- Highlight main points and ideas – look at the first/last sentences of paragraphs. What is the writer trying to persuade you of?



While you are reading

- Identify signposting words and phrases in the text. (See Academic Phrasebank – [link](#))
- Work in short bursts – take regular breaks and have a clear idea of what you expect to achieve in each burst. (See Pomodoro Technique – [link](#))



Read actively

Be actively involved in your reading, rather than passively consuming the words on the page:

- Question and disagree with the author.
- Visualise concepts as a diagram or map – personalise the information.



Review the information gained

- Has the text answered your questions?
- Do you need to revisit any parts?
- Is any further research necessary?
- Will you understand any notes later on?



Read regularly

- Make reading academic texts a habit.
- Improve your reading stamina.
- Effective, regular reading is better than reading quickly.



Taking notes

- Taking notes in lectures.
- Taking notes from reading.



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Taking notes in lectures

The advance of technology in lectures:

- Advantages: lecture slides are almost always available in print or online, and more than ever are recorded using Panopto.
- Disadvantages: The temptation not to attend or to zone out is greater, and NOT all lectures are recorded.



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Taking notes in lectures

- Just like reading, prime yourself with background work:
 - Pose questions the lecture may address.
 - Brush up on vocabulary.
 - Talk to others about the topic.
 - Make predictions.
 - Have a plan.



Taking notes in lectures

- ❑ Put the handout to one side (especially if it is just a copy of presentation – annotate graphs/charts if necessary).
- ❑ Listen to the in-depth explanations not represented in the slideshow.
- ❑ Don't rely on recorded lectures – these can build up and become overwhelming.



Taking notes in lectures

- Use a shorthand technique, but don't copy everything verbatim.
- If necessary, ask to use your own recording device.
- Consider a standard proforma (e.g. Cornell - [link](#))



Taking notes in lectures

TOPIC:	Course:
LECTURE NO:	Date:
	Page:
Notes:	Summary:
Overall summary:	



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Making notes from reading

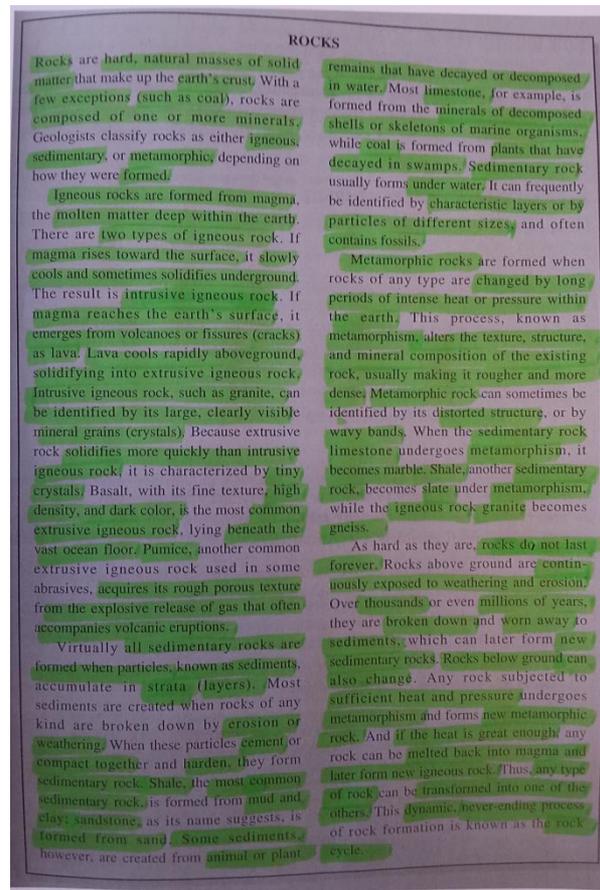
- ❑ You have more time to think – use it.
- ❑ Arrange notes as personalised summaries – use your own words.
- ❑ Answer your priming questions.
- ❑ Use mind maps to link ideas.
- ❑ Make notes as visual as you can (colours, images).
- ❑ Don't just highlight everything.



What's wrong with this marking?

No thought given to importance: everything that *might* be important highlighted

No thought given to own thoughts, ideas or opinions



Highlighting is *busy work* to keep your mind off THINKING and ENGAGING with the subject



What's wrong with these notes?

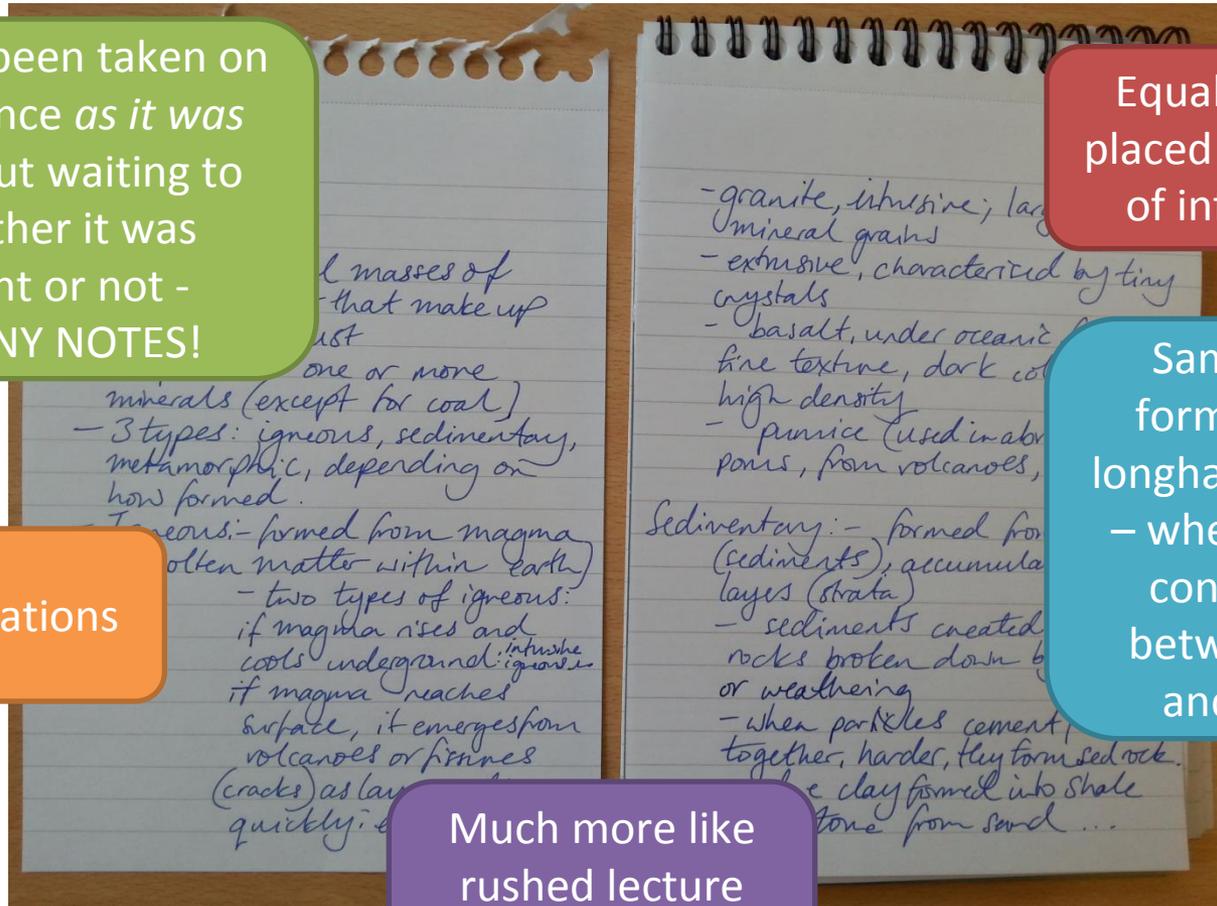
Notes have been taken on each sentence *as it was read* without waiting to see whether it was important or not -
TOO MANY NOTES!

No abbreviations

Much more like rushed lecture notes than research notes

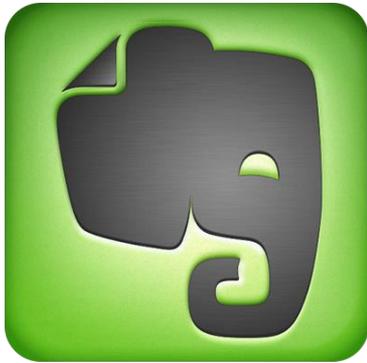
Equal emphasis placed on all items of information

Same linear format as the longhand passage - where are the connections between facts and ideas?



Combine lecture and reading notes

- Type-up and synthesise your notes as soon as you can after making them.
- Use a cloud-based note-making system.

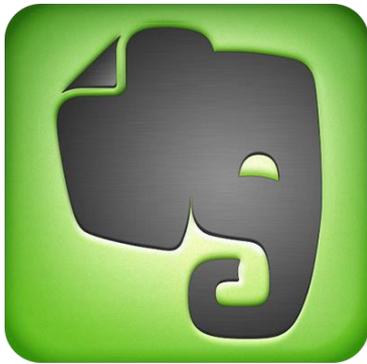


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Combine lecture and reading notes

- Consider whether your combined notes help you answer any pre-questions you asked.
- Use your notes as a tool to answer past papers and integrate into revision.



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Learn how to search

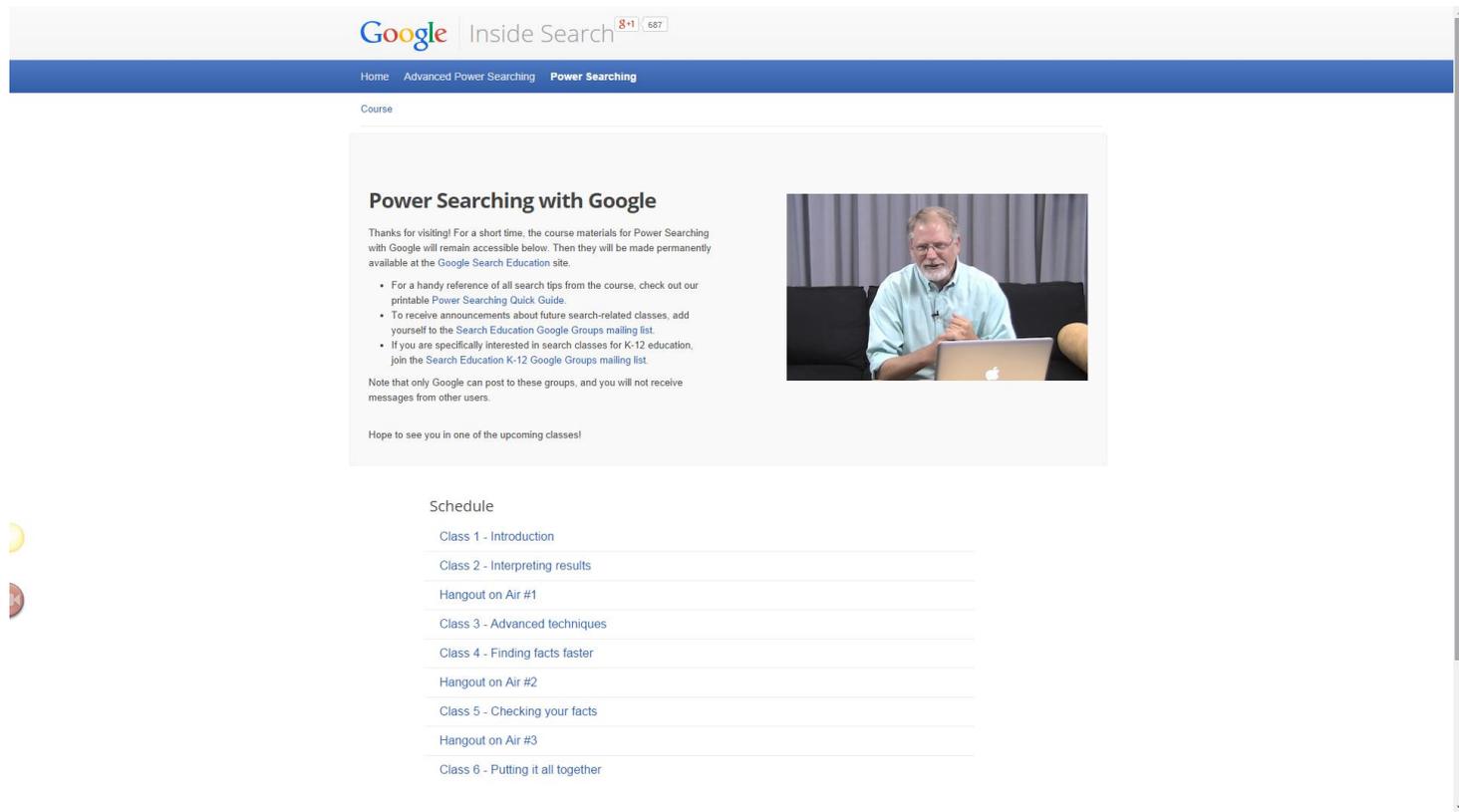
- Get your head around Boolean logic.
- Become familiar with findit@bham and all relevant databases.



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Power Searching with Google



The screenshot shows the Google Inside Search interface for the 'Power Searching with Google' course. At the top, the Google logo is followed by 'Inside Search' and a search bar containing '8+1' and '687'. Below this is a navigation bar with links for 'Home', 'Advanced Power Searching', and 'Power Searching'. The main content area is titled 'Course' and features the course title 'Power Searching with Google'. A paragraph of text explains that the course materials will remain accessible below and will be made permanently available at the Google Search Education site. A bulleted list provides instructions on how to access the materials, including a link to a printable quick guide and information about mailing lists. A note specifies that only Google can post to these groups. A video thumbnail shows a man sitting at a desk with a laptop. Below the main content is a 'Schedule' section listing six classes and three hangout sessions.

Google Inside Search 8+1 687

Home Advanced Power Searching Power Searching

Course

Power Searching with Google

Thanks for visiting! For a short time, the course materials for Power Searching with Google will remain accessible below. Then they will be made permanently available at the Google Search Education site.

- For a handy reference of all search tips from the course, check out our printable [Power Searching Quick Guide](#).
- To receive announcements about future search-related classes, add yourself to the [Search Education Google Groups mailing list](#).
- If you are specifically interested in search classes for K-12 education, join the [Search Education K-12 Google Groups mailing list](#).

Note that only Google can post to these groups, and you will not receive messages from other users.

Hope to see you in one of the upcoming classes!



Schedule

- Class 1 - Introduction
- Class 2 - Interpreting results
- Hangout on Air #1
- Class 3 - Advanced techniques
- Class 4 - Finding facts faster
- Hangout on Air #2
- Class 5 - Checking your facts
- Hangout on Air #3
- Class 6 - Putting it all together



Academic Skills Centre

Location

1st floor, main library

Telephone

(0121) 414 3666

Email

asc@contacts.bham.ac.uk

Web

intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/libraryservices/library/skills/asc/index.aspx

The screenshot shows the University of Birmingham Intranet page for the Academic Skills Centre (ASC). The header includes the University of Birmingham logo, the text 'UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM | INTRANET', and navigation links for 'Main website', 'Login', 'For students', and 'For staff'. A search icon is also present. The breadcrumb trail reads: 'University of Birmingham Intranet > Academic Services > Library Services > Library > Skills and training > Academic Skills Centre'. The main heading is 'Academic Skills Centre (ASC)'. The page is organized into a grid of service tiles. The first row includes 'Academic skills' (with an icon of a book and pen), 'Mathematics Support Centre' (with mathematical symbols like ω , π , \sum , $x(y^2)$, ϕ , δ , and the number 3.14159265359), and 'Library and information skills' (with an icon of an open book). The second row includes 'Digital Skills' (with an icon of a person at a computer), 'One-to-one appointments' (with an icon of two people at a table), and 'PASS' (with an icon of three people). The third row includes 'Academic Skills Gateway', 'Feedback', and 'Contact us'. On the right side, there is a sidebar titled 'In 'Academic Skills Centre'' with a list of links: 'Academic Skills Centre', 'New Taught Student Welcome events', 'Events and workshops', 'Transition to University', 'Mature undergraduate students', 'Taught Postgraduates', 'What to expect', 'ASC resources', 'Top tips for revision', 'Appointments', 'Maths Support', 'Academic skills support', and 'Contact us'.



Academic Skills Gateway

The screenshot shows the Academic Skills Gateway website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: Home, Learning how to learn, Maths and statistics, Research skills, Working with others, and Writing skills. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Library Services Academic Skills Gateway**: A header section with a green and orange gradient.
- Learning how to learn**: A section with a lightbulb icon and a link to "Learning how to learn".
- Maths and statistics**: A section with a "1+2" icon and a link to "Maths and statistics".
- Research skills**: A section with a magnifying glass icon and a link to "Research skills".
- Working with others**: A section with a group of people icon and a link to "Working with others".
- Writing skills**: A section with a quill pen icon and a link to "Writing skills".

Below these sections, there are social media icons for Facebook and Twitter, and the University of Birmingham Library Services logo.

On the right side of the page, there is a sidebar with the following sections:

- Academic Skills Centre**: A header section.
- Confidential 1-1 appointments**: A section with links to "Academic Skills appointments" and "Digital Skills appointments".
- Workshops and classes**: A section with links to "Academic Skills workshop registration" and "Digital Skills workshop registration".
- Library and Information Skills**: A section with links to "A-Z list of Guides", "College of Arts and Law", "College of Engineering and Physical Sciences", "College of Life and Environmental Sciences", "College of Medical and Dental Sciences", and "College of Social Science".
- Stand-alone resources**: A section with links to "Guide to Effective Learning (GEL)", "Successfully transitioning to postgraduate studies", and "Skills4Study Campus".
- Feedback**: A green button.
- Accessibility**: A black button.
- Mathematics Support Centre**: A section with a logo.
- FindIt@Bham**: A section with a logo.



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libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg