



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



Active reading and note-making

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Academic Reading

Can be daunting:

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



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.



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.

It's okay NOT to read every book, journal and website on a given topic



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?'



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 Is it out-of-date or still relevant to your project?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





Light reading

Close reading

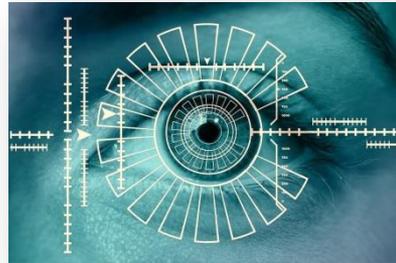


Reading techniques

- When carrying out one of the following activities, which is the most appropriate reading technique to use?



Skimming



Scanning



**Light
reading**



**Close
reading**



Reading techniques

Activity	Technique
1. Using a text for background reading, perhaps to fill-out your background knowledge of a subject.	
2. Dealing with a text that is deemed to be essential reading and a key element of the course, essay or presentation.	
3. Deciding whether a book will be useful for a specific assignment.	
4. Getting an overview of a journal article.	
5. Researching specific data in a report.	



Question what you are reading

Active vs Passive

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

Active vs Passive

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.



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 agree or disagree with findings? Why?
- 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.



Make useful notes

- ❑ Make notes clear, concise and relevant.
- ❑ Don't try to record everything from a lecture – main points.
- ❑ Read actively – set questions and test expectations.
- ❑ Revisit your notes regularly
- ❑ Make links between ideas.



Taking notes

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



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.



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](#)).
- Ask lectures about 'guided notes' ([link 1](#), [link 2](#)) or use them in student group study.



Taking notes in lectures

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



Making notes from reading

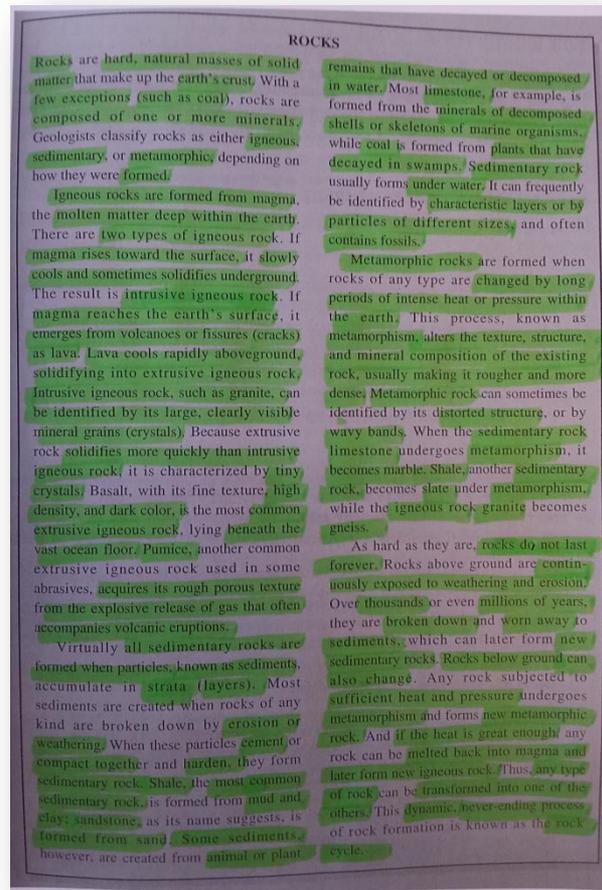
- You have more time to think – use it.
- Arrange notes as personalised summaries – use your own words.
- Answer your priming questions.
- Use mind maps to link ideas.
- Make notes as visual as you can (colours, images).
- Don't just highlight everything.



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?

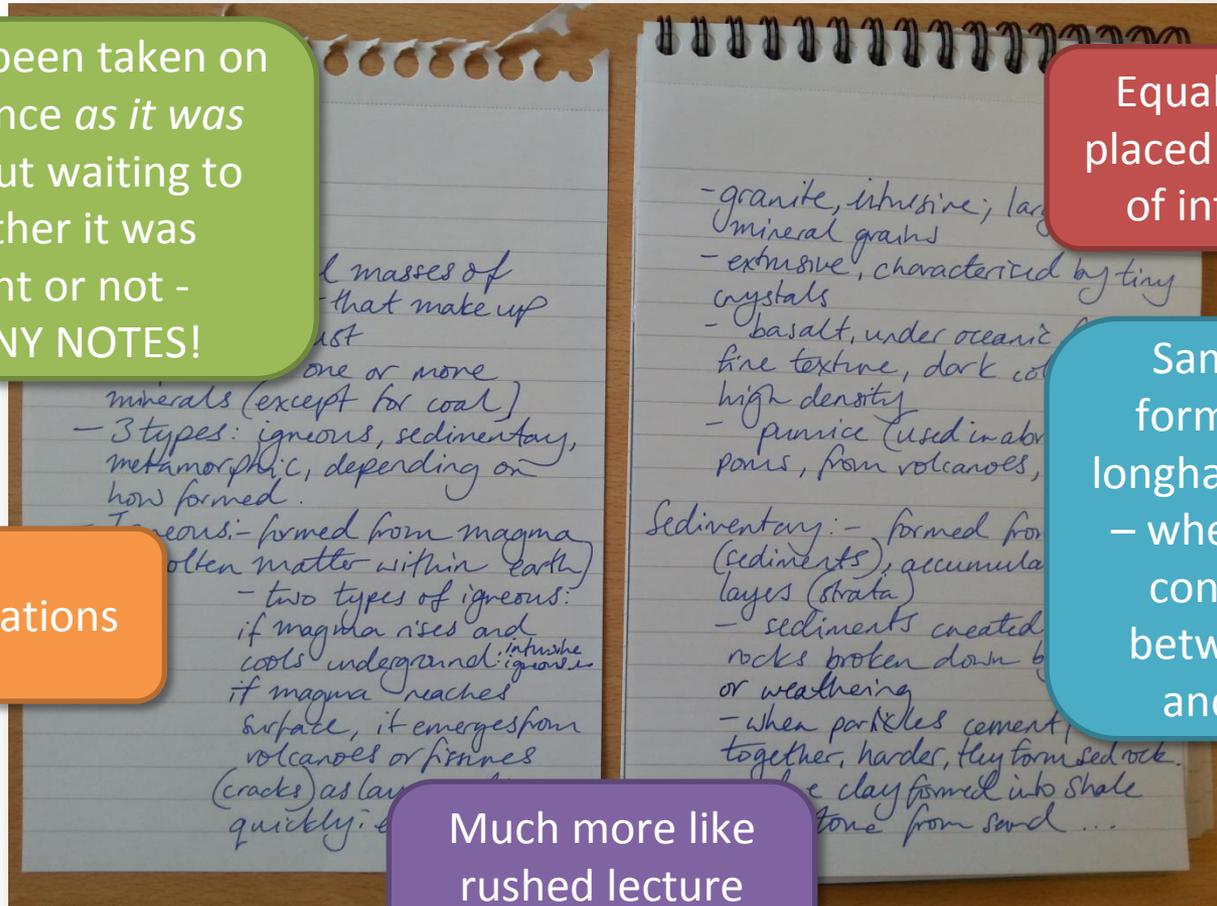
Notes have been taken on each sentence *as it was read* without waiting to see whether it was important or not -
TOO MANY NOTES!

No abbreviations

Much more like rushed lecture notes than research notes

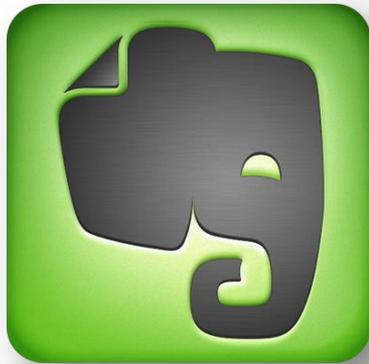
Equal emphasis placed on all items of information

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.



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.



Learn to explain

- Consider the Feynman technique:

STEP 1

Write the name of a concept at the top of whatever place you are planning to record your notes. While purists will push for a physical pen and paper, this isn't necessarily prescriptive - for example a whiteboard or digital note taking app may be used, as long as you maintain focus and attention.



Learn to explain

- Consider the Feynman technique:

STEP 2

Begin to write out an explanation of the concept on your recording area. The important thing here is to write it as if you were explaining it to a layman who has no knowledge of the concept. This will begin to highlight what you understand, but more importantly where you have gaps in your knowledge.



Learn to explain

- Consider the Feynman technique:

STEP 3

Pinpoint these exact gaps, essentially the areas where explanation is a struggle. Go back to your source material, and reread and relearn these parts. Repeat Step 2 as a feedback loop as many times as you require.



Learn to explain

- Consider the Feynman technique:

STEP 4

Once you have properly explained the concept, put on your editor's hat. If you are using overly wordy or confusing language (or simply paraphrasing the source material) keep filtering your content. Humans are really good at adding complexity - it takes a lot more cognitive effort to remove it. Simplify your language, and, where possible, use simple analogy.

As you work you should start to internalize the background, context and details. Just make sure you are making the information your own.

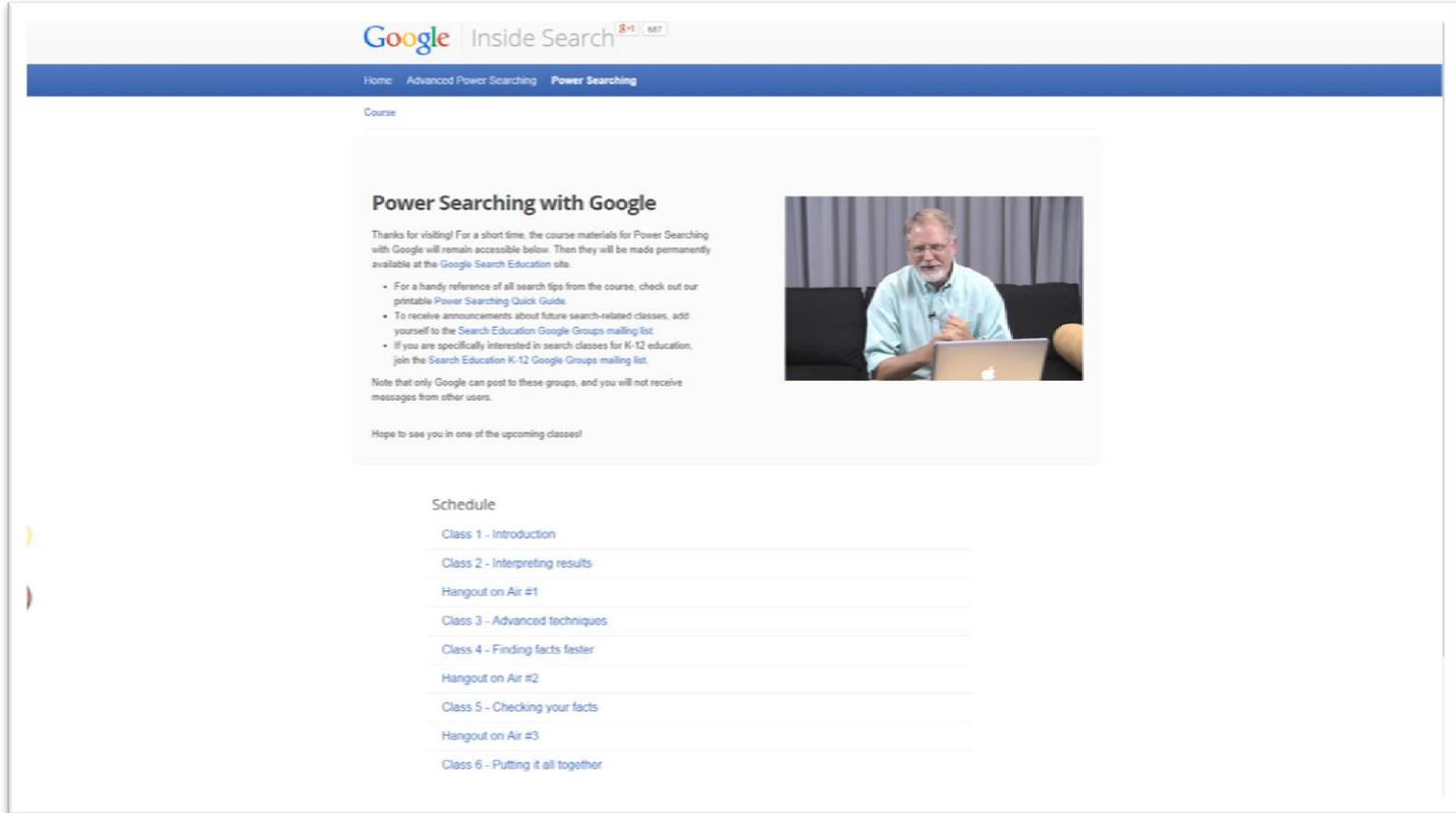


Learn how to search

- Find out about Boolean logic for searching.
- Become familiar with findit@bham and all relevant databases.



Power Searching with Google



The screenshot shows the Google Inside Search interface for a course titled "Power Searching with Google". The page has a blue header with the Google logo and "Inside Search" text. Below the header, there are navigation links for "Home", "Advanced Power Searching", and "Power Searching". The main content area features a "Course" section with a video thumbnail of a man speaking. Below the video, there 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/asc

The screenshot shows the University of Birmingham Intranet page for the Academic Skills Centre (ASC). The header includes the university logo, 'UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM INTRANET', and navigation links for 'Main website', 'Login', 'For students', and 'For staff'. 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 and a right-hand navigation menu. The tiles include: 'Academic skills' (Workshops and guides to develop your skills), 'Mathematics Support Centre' (Maths and stats support), 'Library and information skills' (Find and cite resources for your study and research), 'Digital Skills' (Training in stats software, digital images, spreadsheets and more), 'One-to-one appointments' (Develop and improve your academic skills), and 'PASS' (Peer Assisted Study Sessions for first year undergraduates). The right-hand menu lists: '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'. At the bottom of the grid are links for 'Academic Skills Gateway', 'Feedback', and 'Contact us'.



Academic Skills Gateway



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Academic Skills Gateway. At the top left is the University of Birmingham logo and 'LIBRARY SERVICES'. Below this is a breadcrumb trail: 'Library Services / LibGuides / Academic Skills Gateway / Home'. The main heading is 'Academic Skills Gateway: Home' with a search bar to its right. A navigation menu includes 'Home', 'Learning at University', 'Research Skills', 'Advanced Digital Skills', 'Writing Skills', 'Subject Support', and 'Dubai Campus'. The main banner features a clock tower and the text: "Get started on your academic journey." LEARNING AT UNIVERSITY. A sidebar on the right is titled 'ASC ACADEMIC SKILLS CENTRE' and lists services: Confidential 1-1 appointments, Workshops and classes, Library and Information Skills, and Stand-alone resources. A bottom sidebar lists 'Library Services', 'Academic Skills Centre', 'Research Support', 'FindIt@Bham', and 'Mathematics Support Centre'. The main content area has a vertical list of links: Learning at University, Research Skills, Advanced Digital Skills, Writing Skills, Subject Support, and Dubai Campus.

libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg

