

CRITICAL READING PROCESS

BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a snack/drink (non-alcoholic) • Check your email • Make any necessary phone calls, then turn off your phone • Go to the bathroom • Clear a block of time of at least an hour • Find your happy place (physically and mentally) • Gather all of your materials (reading assignment, textbook, notebook, class notes, pen/pencil, highlighter, dictionary) • Skim the text for general meaning (note any headings) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight/underline important points (key terms, definitions, topic sentences) • Write down your questions/reactions/comments (these can be agreeing or disagreeing with the author's claims, questioning the meaning of a block of text, asking how the text relates to what you're learning in class, etc.) • Write down any unfamiliar words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look up unfamiliar words and write down their definitions • Look over the notes you took (write down any answers that you may have discovered to your questions, decide which questions could be brought up in class, etc.) • Take a short nap or a quick walk • Re-read the text, using your notes/questions as a guide

While some of the items in the “before” list may seem a bit silly, they are all valid pieces of the critical reading process. You’re less likely to retain information if you’re hungry, thinking about people you wanted/needed to talk to, or are uncomfortable. If you study best in a hard chair in a library, that’s your happy place and that’s where you should do your reading. If you study best under a tree in the park, go there (you may want to find a substitute happy place in the winter). The point is that you need to clear away all distractions in order to begin to read critically, and once you begin, you should not have to interrupt yourself to find a pen or look for your syllabus.

Expect to read the text more than once. Academic texts may be introducing ideas that are new to you. Most people do not fully grasp a new idea after hearing or seeing it just once. It takes time, and repetition, to absorb the ideas the text presents. Obviously, you do not have to take a nap, but 15 minutes of down time can help clear your mind and refresh you just enough to re-engage with the material.