

# What is *Deep* Reading?

**Julian Hermida, Algoma University (excerpt from [tomprof.stanford.edu](http://tomprof.stanford.edu)):**

“A deep approach to reading is an approach where the reader uses higher-order cognitive skills such as the ability to *analyse, synthesize, solve problems, and thinks meta-cognitively* in order to negotiate meanings with the author and to construct new meaning from the text. The deep reader focuses on the author’s message, on the ideas she is trying to convey, the line of argument, and the structure of the argument. The reader *makes connections to already known concepts and principles* and uses this understanding for problem solving in new contexts.”

**Maryanne Wolf & Mirit Barzillai (“The Importance of Deep Reading,” *Educational Leadership*. Mar2009. Vol. 66, No.6. March 2009):**

“By deep reading, we mean the array of sophisticated processes that propel comprehension and that include *inferential and deductive reasoning, analogical skills, critical analysis, reflection, and insight*...Digital culture’s emphasis on immediacy...presents a Gordian knot of cognitive advantages and challenges for the present and upcoming generations, which, if unaddressed, could affect the already diminishing role of contemplation in our society Moreover, these emphases of the digital culture may radically change how we learn to read and acquire information. And they may well change how we think.”

**Barry Casey, Trinity Washington University (excerpt from [facultyfocus.com](http://facultyfocus.com)):**

“I have been experimenting with a simple method I call GSSW: Gather, Sort, Shrink, and Wrap....During the Gather stage, the students pair up and read through the text out loud together, *looking for ideas that seem to stand out or lead to other ideas*....In the Sort stage, we *cluster the ideas into chunks, both for retention and for understanding the general themes* that run through the text....During the Shrink stage, the students further refine the chunks of important ideas and themes down to *essential thoughts that can be expressed through their own words in several complete sentences*....By this stage the students have a much deeper understanding of the text and could probably *explain their findings to another audience*....In the Wrap phase, students summarize and prepare to “ship” the essentials out, perhaps in an outline form, a mind map, an if-then diagram, or a simple, clear, and visual Keynote or PowerPoint presentation.”

**Barry Cull (“Reading Revolutions: Online Digital Text and Implications for Reading in Academe,” *First Monday*, Vol. 16, No. 6. June 2011. [firstmonday.org](http://firstmonday.org)):**

“[Deep reading] takes time. The power of reading, whether of print or online text, continues to lie in this power of time—time to digest words, time to read between the lines, *time to reflect on ideas*, and time to think beyond one’s self, one’s place, and one’s time in the pursuit of knowledge.”

# Deep Reading Techniques

You may first want to **speed read** the text, using the techniques on the bottom section of this page. Then reread the entire text more slowly, using the following three standard close reading practices. Deep reading is usually most effectively done in a distraction-free place, free of music or screens—such as the silent or quiet zone of a library.

1. **Underline** key phrases or sentences.
2. Make **notes** (in the margins, or on a separate piece of paper) on how the text relates to other things you have read previously, things learned in a class, or other prior knowledge you have.
3. **Summarize** the entire text, in your own words. Make your summary brief—perhaps only use a maximum of two or three sentences, depending upon the length of the text being summarized. If possible, briefly explain your summary, **orally**, to another person.

Deep reading includes “**reading between the lines**”, asking these sorts of questions about the text: What has the author left unsaid? Is their logic valid? If it is a scientific study, are the methods appropriate? Who is the intended audience? What is the author’s purpose (explicit, implicit, or hidden)? What biases might the author have? What is the author’s “tone”, or emotional attitude towards their topic?

# Speed Reading Techniques

Quickly reading a text typically involves both **skimming** (reading quickly to get the general idea of a text) and **scanning** (skipping to key words or phrases). It is especially useful when you have a large volume of text, such as a group of academic **journal articles, books, or government reports**.

Typically, academic researchers start by speed reading a long text, and then focus in on specific article/chapter/portion to read more closely. Here are a few tips:

1. Read the **abstract** closely, if there is one.
2. Carefully read the first **introduction** section, or first two or three paragraphs.
3. Scan through **headings**, or the **first few words of each paragraph** in the text.
4. Read the **concluding** paragraph/section, or the **results** or **discussion** sections of an article. You may then want to **repeat** any or all of steps 1-3.

Another way of quickly digesting a body of scientific literature is to use **Scopus or another library database** to find a literature **review** article, sometimes known a “meta-analysis”.