

Reading “Attack” Strategies

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Once students enter secondary and university classrooms out of their native country, they are expected to perform at near-native levels when reading in English. Many of these students will need to read five or more text chapters a night just to keep up in their classes. The quantity of reading material can be a major obstacle for second language readers.

Reading “attack” strategies help academically-oriented students read more efficiently and more quickly while also practicing techniques to process and condense large quantities of information for later test review. Students should be able to both articulate the purpose for each strategy and routinely apply the strategies in class and on exams. Strategies should be taught as soon as possible in the term, then practiced and reinforced throughout the course. With each new text, students begin at the start of the attack sequence, progressively adding more strategies as they master each.

Set up

1. Explain to students that reading “attack” strategies are for quickly getting information about a text (e. g., *You’re on the bus to school and you know you’ll have a quiz over the reading, but you had no time to read it.*) or when you just have too much information to read and must read very efficiently to identify what you then need to read slowly (e. g., *Most freshmen in college have to read 2-3 chapters in each of 4 or 5 courses a week, so how do you get through 15 chapters a week?*)
2. Hand out a reading guide with attack strategies or verbally introduce strategies and ask students to write each down as you explain and practice (test knowledge of strategies later).
3. Guide students through each “attack” strategy, as listed below. Go through the entire sequence with each new reading.

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	Do this	Why?
1.	Read the title & predict.	Get your brain ready for the subject.
2.	Read the first and last sentence of the first and last paragraph.	Power positions likely contain the thesis or main idea.
3.	Skim / scan entire text and note the "skeleton".	See the structure. Guess main topics from "parts" & "charts".
4.	Read the first and last sentence of each paragraph. List the major topics in the margin.	Note where main ideas / topic begin and end. Decide what information is familiar.
5.	Speed read in major topic "chunks" and note crucial paragraphs to re-read slowly.	Identify main ideas vs. details.
6.	Reread crucial paragraphs. Highlight, take margin notes, & decide need for clarification.	Condense, focus and prepare for later review.

Additional Strategies to Expand or Reinforce Comprehension

After Step 1: Guess and explain to a partner (or write down) what the reading is about (*don't worry if you're right or wrong*).

After Step 2: Put your finger on the thesis statement so the teacher can check it. (*What is the main thing you're supposed to learn / to believe?*)

After Step 4: Define the audience (*general, mothers, biologists?*) and the purpose (*to inform, to persuade, to change attitudes?*).

After Step 6: Decide if you should outline it to condense (*Can you study from only the outline?*). If you decide to outline, also list page numbers on which good examples and good definitions are given and page numbers of parts you still find confusing. This way you can study from your outline, but also refer to specific text pages as you prepare for the test.

Additional Strategies When Studying for Test-Taking Purposes

7. List special vocabulary on the left side of a page and the definition or a good example on the right side of the same page. Fold lengthwise and “quiz” yourself by trying to match the word and definition / example.
8. List key concepts, definitions, examples in terms of “descriptors” (e. g., *Industrial Revolution, iron ore smelting, steam engine, mining, pump, assembly line. Reforms in agriculture, excess labor supply, unions, child labor laws.*)
9. Summarize the key concepts to a study partner and predict questions that will be asked by the professor.
10. Work in small groups to construct literal, interpretive, and applied type questions and answers over the content. Trade and rate each groups’ questions.
11. Find and list page numbers where the answers are found (literal) then work in a group to decide and write answers to the “best” interpretive and applied questions.
12. Receive teacher feedback regarding group work, both group-developed questions and answers.