

Learning Strategies for International GRADUATE Students

READING

The volume of reading in graduate school is enormous. If you don't have effective reading skills, you will quickly get behind. Lack of confidence in the subject and/or English often underpins slow reading. You need to learn to speed up first. Your comprehension and confidence will follow.

Common Reading Concerns

- I read every word because I worry about missing something important.
- Using my dictionary slows me down but my vocabulary is weak.
- I tell myself I'm a poor reader.

Strategies to Improve Reading

1. Rapid Read Before Reading for Detail

Survey & Skim—scan headings, figures, abstract. Get a feel for the text as a whole. Locate key content words/phrases and transition words which define the organizational structure. Locate the thesis or purpose of the text.

2. Read Widely

The best way to improve your vocabulary is by reading. Read anything, not just academic texts. Start with easy, enjoyable materials. For academic jargon, make a personalized dictionary and review your words weekly.

3. Send Yourself Positive Messages

e.g. "I am a good reader; however, I don't read as fast as I'd like right now."

For more information, go to our online module

<http://www.queensu.ca/learningstrategies/grad/reading/module.html>

MANAGING TIME

Common Concerns

- Lack of skills: e.g. managing a large project
- Procrastination
- Open or flexible schedule
- Limited external accountability

Strategies to Get Organized

- Ask your supervisor to assist you in getting organized, e.g. setting up a long range plan which can be reviewed and modified regularly.

- Set up regular meetings with your supervisor to review the plan. Send a work report on a regular basis.
- Consider using electronic macro-planning tools such as:
 - * Queen's Learning Commons Thesis Manager and Dissertation Calculator at <http://www.queensu.ca/qlc/Thesis.html>
 - * Gantt Chart to help plan your time and tasks. For free software go to www.ganttproject.biz, or <http://www.pureviolet.net/ganttpv/>
- Create a weekly work-life schedule that **balances** academic and non-academic tasks. Your supervisor may be able to help you with this or you may wish to have a professional consultation with a Learning Strategies counsellor.
- Take workshops on time and information management. Learning Strategies Development offers time management workshops and the Library has workshops on RefWorks and Write n' Cite. Register at <http://www.queensu.ca/qlc/index.html>
- For more information about time management, go to our online module <http://www.queensu.ca/learningstrategies/grad/tm/module.html>

COPING WITH STRESS

Common Reactions to High Levels of Stress

- Distractibility
- Irritability or impatience
- Lethargy, exhaustion
- Body tension or somatic illnesses
- Loss of self-confidence

Graduate programs are intense and pressured so stress is common. However, international students have to deal with additional stressors, e.g. cultural, social, and language adjustment, which may further increase stress. If adjusting to Queen's is causing you high levels of stress, consider consulting our cross-cultural counsellor at Queen's Counselling Service. Call 613 533 6000 ext. 78264.

Relaxation Strategies

- Breathe deeply and slowly from the diaphragm. Count to 4 while inhaling, hold for 4 and then exhale for 8.
- Close your eyes and visualize a relaxing, stress-free place.
- Ensure that your schedule allows for guilt-free play.
- Accept what you cannot control. Check the grad newsletter for dates and times of stress reduction and management workshops.
- Laugh!

For more information, go to our online module <http://www.queensu.ca/learningstrategies/grad/stress/module.html>

FOCUS & CONCENTRATION

Having to concentrate on heavy, difficult information for long periods of time, especially in a language you are still acquiring, can be exhausting. Add to this, poor sleep, stress, fears or worries, and your focus can be dramatically

reduced.

Common Problems

- I'm so easily distracted.
- I can't concentrate because I'm worrying all the time.
- I get so tired reading in English.

Strategies to Improve your Concentration

- **Download your worry.** International students have unique worries and stressors (e.g. cultural adjustment, language issues). If these worries are interrupting your work, try jotting them down. Writing down the worries allows your mind to go back to work, at least for awhile.
- **Study in short blocks of time.** Try the 50-10-50 approach: study for 50 minutes then take a 10 minute "power break" where you get up and move.
- **Sleep is key to concentration.** So, don't study when very tired and make sure you get a full night sleep. Taking a 15 minute nap early afternoon can help, too.
- **Seek professional help.** If distractibility is a chronic or acute problem, make an appointment to talk to us.

For more information go to the UNDERGRADUATE tab to the **Academic Reading** module
<http://www.queensu.ca/learningstrategies/undergrad/reading/module/beingaware.html>

and open the pdf file "Improve Your Concentration".

SPEAKING OUT

Many students worry about speaking out at university. They are often concerned how others will judge their ideas. If you are still acquiring English, speaking can cause even more anxiety if you worry about making mistakes. The truth is most people don't care if you make a language error or have a different "accent"; they just want to understand you.

Strategies for Formal Presentations

- Practice out loud several times. Memorize the introduction. Time yourself.
- Ensure that you can correctly pronounce all key vocabulary.
- The audience remembers the last few minutes so make your conclusion strong.

Strategies for Speaking in a Group

- Promise yourself that you will say something in each discussion. Try asking a question instead of adding an opinion. It's easier and safer.
- Read the relevant materials before the discussion so you know the content and vocabulary.

For more information, go to our online resource **Tackling Presentation Anxiety at Graduate School**
<http://www.queensu.ca/learningstrategies/grad/presentation.html>