

How to Take Notes While You Read
Or
How to Be a Better Reader

Whenever I ask students if they like to read, I generally hear a resounding “NO!” When I ask them why, students will say “It’s boring!” or “I fall asleep!” or “It’s just not interesting.”

My response to these: You aren’t doing it right.

Let’s face it. Most people who don’t like to read go into a reading task with dread or even resentment. They don’t want to waste their time on reading something that won’t matter to them, or on something they don’t understand.

Unfortunately, that attitude will *never allow* them to enjoy reading. In order to enjoy reading, a person **MUST** go into the reading believing he or she will get something out of it. In order to get something out of the reading, the reader must put effort into the reading and be an active participant in the process.

The difference between an active reader and a passive reader is HUGE: the active reader thinks about the text, the passive reader merely looks at the words. It doesn’t seem like a big difference, but it is. The active reader has thoughts about the text and will voice them; the passive reader allows the author to have all the thoughts.

To be an active participant in the reading process, do the following:

1. **Take notes while you read.** Many people just like to skim the pages or they only look at the words instead of actually reading them. Taking notes while you read will force you to focus on the reading and figuring out what is going on. Even if you don’t understand *why* things are happening, if you understand *what* is happening will help you. If you have questions, write them down; you might be able to answer the questions later on, or get an answer from class discussions.
2. **Summarize each chapter.** Stop for a moment and write a summary or a few bullet points about what happened in the chapter. **DO NOT** look back into the chapter, just work from memory. This way, later on you will be able to look for specific events without having to re-read the whole thing. This is also a good place for you to make connections between events in the plot, make connections to your life, or make connections to other ideas you have.
3. **Write a response to the book when you get to the end.** By the end of the book, you will have ideas: reactions to the climax or the resolution, opinion of the plot or characters, emotional connections, connections to other stories, the “OMG!” moments that made you realize how everything connected, **ALL KINDS OF THINGS**. Take a few minutes to write these down.

The important things to remember are these: The reader’s thoughts matter. The author is not the only one with ideas. The best readers are the ones who think about what they read.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Active Reading Assignment

Reading Assignment: _____

1. Notes during the reading.

These can be comments about the text, questions about the text, or insights you have.

2. Summarize what you've read.

You can use bullet points or write a paragraph.

3. Respond to what you've read.

Connect the pieces of the plot together, make connections to your life, make connections to other things you have read or seen before. What, if anything, did you learn from the text? Voice your ideas.