



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
School of Social and
Political Science

**STUDENT
DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE**

+

**SKILLS
EMPLOYABILITY**

SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

READING SKILLS



WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

1. Understand what social scientists read and why
2. Know how to find required and further readings
3. Discuss common reading challenges and identify strategies for overcoming them



Reading Skills

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

- What are reading skills?
- How to find readings
- Evaluating sources
- Approaching a reading: understanding structure
- Being a critical reader
- Making notes
- Further resources

WHAT ARE READING SKILLS?

- Reading skills help you to:
 - Identify the texts that will best support your learning
 - Get the information you need from a text in an efficient way
 - Understand the text (and identify areas you don't understand so that you can follow up later)
 - Evaluate the strengths and weakness of a text and use this to to inform your thinking and arguments

WHY ARE READING SKILLS IMPORTANT?

- As students, you are expected to read extensively throughout your degree.
- Reading helps you to:
 - **Prepare for lectures and tutorials** – you are expected to arrive having done the required reading as this forms the basis of the discussions.
 - **Complete assignments** – in essays, exams, and presentations, you will be asked to use evidence from your readings to support your arguments.
 - **Develop as an independent researcher** – over the course of your degree, you will need to read to learn about new topics, concepts and ideas, deepen your understanding, and gather evidence and explore counter-arguments. Attending lectures and tutorials alone is no substitute for independent research.

HOW TO FIND READINGS

- Resource List:
 - Your course leader may have made an online reading list– check online at: <http://resourcelists.ed.ac.uk/>. These contain links to library shelf locations and e-resources so is very efficient to use.
 - Course Handbook: Your course reading list is also printed in your course handbook.
 - DiscoverEd: This service allows you to search the university library's collections for books, e-books, journal articles, databases and more. <https://discovered.ed.ac.uk/>
 - Online resources: these are e-resources that you can access online, such as e-books and online journal articles. Anyone can download these at any time.
 - Physical resources: Some resources, like books, are not available online and are housed in the university library. You can find the shelf location, check availability, and submit return requests through DiscoverEd.



APPROACHING A READING LIST

How can you manage your reading to
ensure you don't fall behind?

- **Read strategically**
 - Prioritise essential over recommended reading
 - Skim readings – esp. the abstract, introduction & conclusion – to learn their key arguments and ideas
 - Think about your essay questions
- **Time management**
 - Give yourself enough time – reading is time-consuming!
 - It's better to skim an article than go to a tutorial unprepared

What do we mean by development and what are the concept's origins?

'Development' has many meanings. This course begins, based on the work of Cowen & Shenton, by distinguishing 'development' in the sense of immanent historical change (that which happens over the course of the unfolding of time) from development in the sense of intentional change (deliberately willed, generally aimed at improving the human condition). Most of the remainder of the course is focused on the latter. We will attempt a brief historicization of the contemporary 'global faith' in development, through reference to Rist and Escobar.

Key reading:

Rist, G. (2006) *The History of Development: from Western Origins to Global Faith* (Chap 4).

Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering Development. The Making and Unmaking of The Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (Chap 2).

Begin reading **ONE** of the following, which you should complete by the time we discuss question 7:

Ferguson, J. (1994). *The Anti-politics Machine: "Development", Depoliticisation and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Li, T. M. (2007). *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Durham & London, Duke University Press.

Mosse, D. (2005). *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice*. London, Pluto Press. [Available as E-Resource via University of Edinburgh Library]

Shipton P (2010) *Credit Between Cultures: Farmers, Financiers, and Misunderstanding in Africa*. Yale University Press New Haven. [Available as E-Resource via University of Edinburgh Library]

Additional Reading:

Comaroff, J. L. & J. (eds). (1999). *Civil society and the political imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Cowen, M. and R. Shenton (1995) 'The Invention of Development' in Crush, J. *Power of Development* (chapter 1)

Rugendyke, B. (2007). 'Lilliputians or leviathans? NGOs as advocates'. In B. Rugendyke (ed.) *NGOs as Advocates for Development in a Globalising World*. Abingdon, Routledge: 1-14.

EVALUATING SOURCES: UNDERSTANDING PEER REVIEW

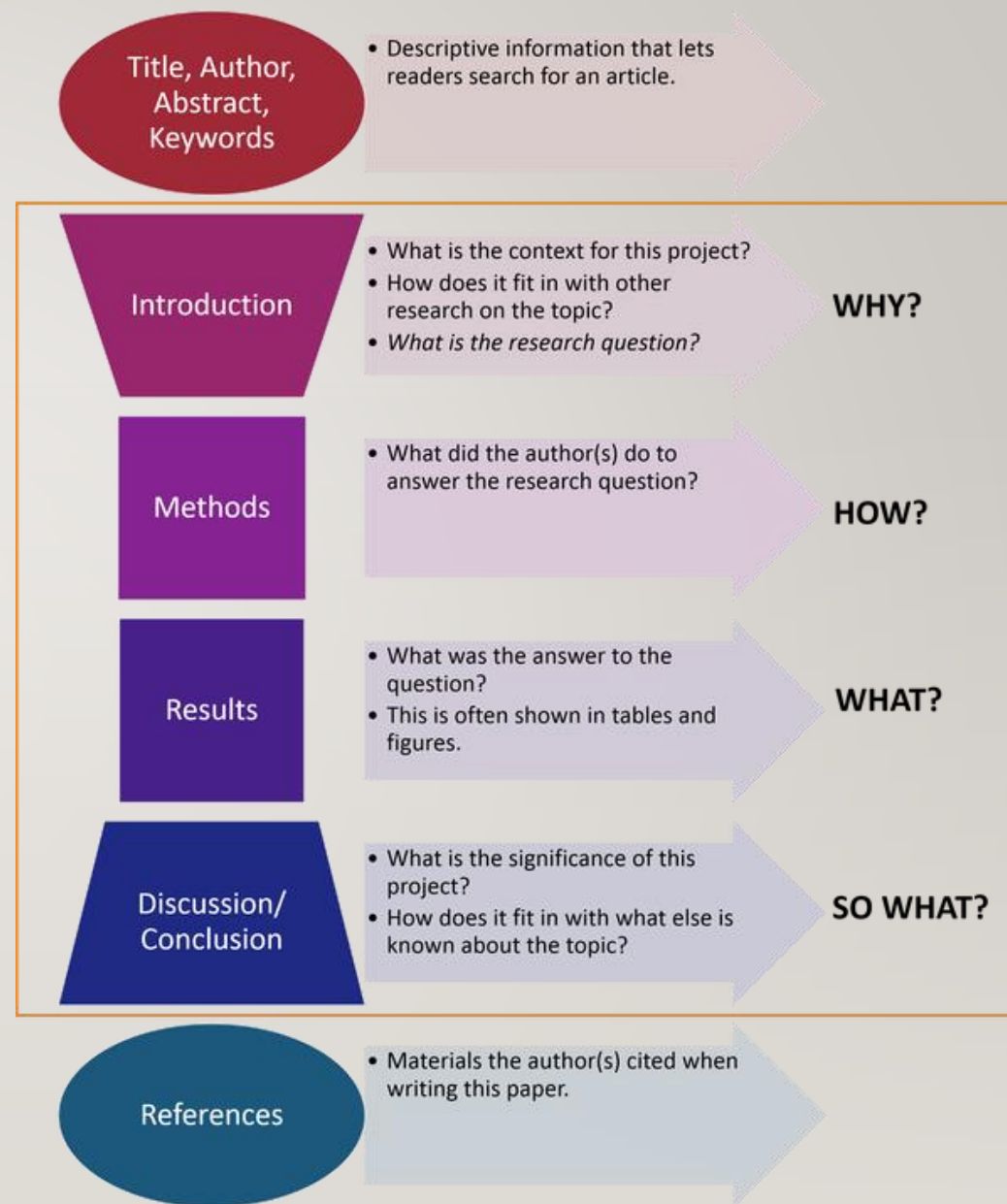
- Knowing *who* wrote and published a text, and the kind of *editorial process* it underwent, means we can *assess its reliability* and decide *how* to approach and engage with it.
- In academia, **peer-reviewed texts** are arguably the gold standard. Peer review is the process of subjecting an author's academic work, research or ideas to the scrutiny of other experts in the same field before a paper or book is published. The reviewers evaluate the work and help the publisher decide whether it should be accepted for publication, revised or rejected.
- Peer-reviewed texts usually include:
 - Books published by a scholarly press
 - Journal articles
- If you're not sure if something is peer-reviewed, look at the publisher or journal's website.

OTHER TYPES OF READING MATERIALS

- Social scientists don't only read things that have gone through peer-review. Over the course of your degree, you might find yourself reading:
 - Newspapers and magazines
 - Reports
 - Blogs
 - Websites (even Wikipedia!)
 - Social media
- Reading all of these things can be useful.
 - **However**, you need to be aware of what kind of source you are reading as this will determine how you might use it in your own research and writing.

APPROACHING A READING: UNDERSTANDING STRUCTURE

- A lot of the readings you encounter will follow this type of structure (either explicitly or implicitly)
- Understanding this structure can help guide your reading – it tells you which parts of the reading to focus on to get a general overview and which parts you might want to read in greater depth



BEING A CRITICAL READER

- Critical reading is a process of analysing, interpreting and evaluating.
- When we read critically, we use our critical thinking skills to **QUESTION** both the text and our own reading of it.
- Critical reading is a more **ACTIVE** way of reading. It is a deeper and more complex engagement with a text.

	READING	CRITICAL READING
PURPOSE	To get a basic grasp of the text	To form judgement about HOW a text works
ACTIVITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absorbing • Understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysing • Interpreting • Evaluating
FOCUS	What a text SAYS	What a text DOES and MEANS
QUESTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the text saying? • What information can I get out of it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the text work? How is it argued? • What are the choices made? The patterns that result? • What kinds of reasoning and evidence are used? • What are the underlying assumptions? • What does the text mean?
DIRECTION	WITH the text (taking for granted it is right)	AGAINST the text (questioning its assumptions and argument, interpreting meaning and context)
RESPONSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restatement • Summary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description • Interpretation • Evaluation

APPROACHING READING WITH A CRITICAL MINDSET

- **Evaluate the source** – is it a reliable source? What are its possible limitations? Who was it written for? When was it published?
- **Scan the reading** – get a sense of what the reading is about by glancing over the abstract, keywords, introduction, chapter/section headings and conclusion. Identify key themes and questions to be on the look out for.
- **Be critical and ask questions**
 - Do I agree with the author's argument? Why?
 - What do I think of the research methods?
 - What do I think of the data?
 - What are the limitations of this research or possible counter-arguments? Has the author adequately addressed these?
 - How does this reading relate to other things I've read?

EXERCISE

- What kind of texts can you see?
- Which texts are peer-reviewed?
- What are the pros and cons of each text?

Anon. No date, Field Research. *Wikipedia* website.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Field_Research. Accessed 5 Sep 2019.

Antrosio, J. 2013. 'Concept of Culture: Ruth Benedict and Boasian Anthropology.' *Living Anthropology* website. Sep. <https://www.livinganthropologically.com/ruth-benedict-culture/>

Clifford, J. 1986. 'Introduction: Partial Truths' in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press: pp.1-26

Fox, Kate 2005. *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*. Hodder & Stoughton.

Helm, A. A. 2001. Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski: A Contrast, Comparison and Analysis. *Alpha Lambda Journal*, 31: pp. 38-47

Koshy, Yojann 2018. Hey' that's our stuff: Maasai tribespeople tackle Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum. *The Guardian*. 4 Dec. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2018/dec/04/pitt-rivers-museum-oxford-maasai-colonial-artefacts>

Mason, P. 2016. How to Write a Book Review. *Culture Matters* website. 20 Dec. <https://culturematters.wordpress.com/2016/12/20/how-to-write-a-book-review/>

MAKING NOTES

- Your notes should...
 - Go beyond simply copying down or summarising
 - Record your critical thinking
 - Help solidify your understanding of a text and identify any points that require further clarification or research
 - Be clear and easy to read so that they can be consulted at a later date, e.g. during exam revision or when writing an essay. Make sure you record the bibliographic information (inc. any important quotes and page numbers) to facilitate referencing later on

FURTHER RESOURCES



NOTE MAKING: 'CRITICAL REVIEW' APPROACH

1. **Summarize** - What is it about?

- The author's purpose, aim or question
- Main argument, central idea, findings and conclusion
- What sort of text is it? General? Specific?

2. **Evaluate** - What do I think about it?

- Who is it written for?
- Particular strengths or points of interest
- Similarities or differences with other things you have read or ideas you hold yourself
- Any weaknesses or limitations?

3. **Reflect** - How might I use it?

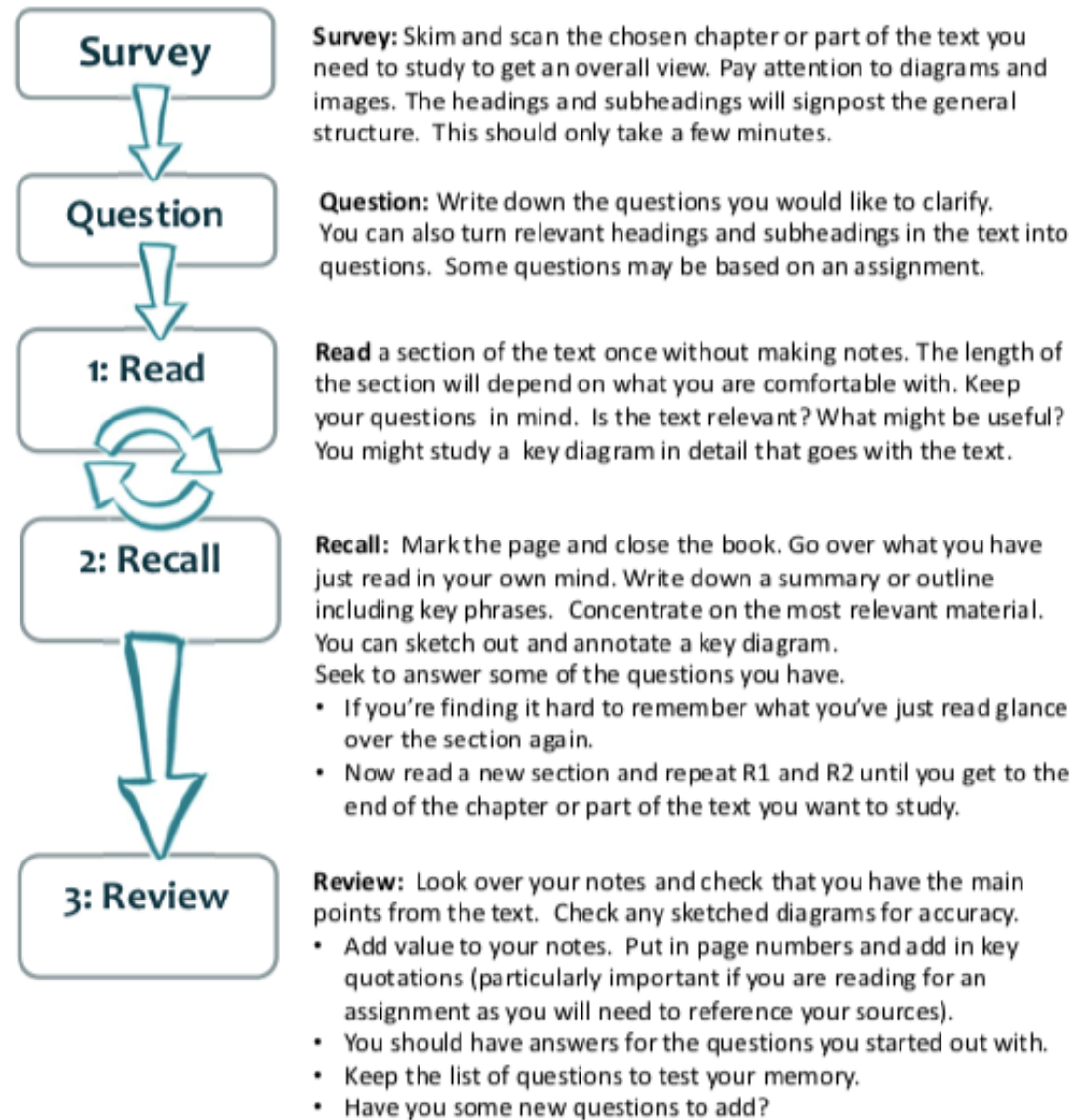
- Has the text helped you understand something better? Or see/do something differently? If so, what? How useful is it? If so, how?

Further information: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/study-hub/learning-resources/reading>

NOTE MAKING: 'SQ3R' APPROACH

Further information:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/study-hub/learning-resources/reading>



NOTE MAKING:

'COMPARE & CONTRAST' APPROACH

- Use a grid to summarise different arguments – this helps you to move away from just writing descriptively about them
- Making comparisons and contrasts between different sources can help you to think more deeply about sources
- Instead of writing about each source separately, write about each theme and make comparisons

	Differences A:	Similarities	Differences B:
theme			
theme			
theme			

Further information: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/study-hub/learning-resources/reading>

NOTE MAKING: 'CRITICAL READING FORM' APPROACH

Further information:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/study-hub/learning-resources/reading>

Creating a critical reading form is a way of interrogating a source using a set of questions. This helps you to focus on the most important aspects. It also helps you to avoid taking lots of detailed notes you might not use.

Create your reading form

1. Create a Word file to use a template.
2. Open and answer your set of questions for each separate text you read.
3. Save these documents with names that include the author's surname or subject.
4. Organise and file so you can find them again.

Start with the bibliographic details: Author, title, date and so on. You'll need to cite your sources accurately.

Add the location (e.g. main library classmark). You might want to find it again!

What questions would you ask?



What's the main point being made?

What's the main line of reasoning?

What's the main evidence?

Does the evidence support the conclusions offered?

A suggested list

- Full reference.
- Who is the author?
- What is this work about?
- What are the main findings of this work?
- How is this work relevant to my course and/or assignment?
- What are the limitations of this work?
- Useful quotations.

What is/are the author(s) aiming to do?

Why am I reading this?

Is it convincing?

Alternative points of view?

Can I summarise it?

Adapt to suit you

- Have a checklist on a postcard and make handwritten notes using it.
- Use printed paper forms – file by author's surname in a ring binder.
- Use a notebook and type up a summary later.

How can I use my notes?

- To make a point
- To advance an argument
- To test an idea
- To make comparisons
- To develop my own view
- To draw my own conclusions




READING A BOOK

Further information:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/study-hub/learning-resources/reading>


1 Before reading

Is it out-of-date?
Is it on the reading list?
Does it have the information you want?
Quickly check - you might only need a small part of the book.

Ditch the book? 


 **Take down the details**

- Author, title, year of publication, publisher and so on.
- Write down the library **classmark** so you can find it again.


Check out the contents page
Which chapters or sections are likely to have what you want?
Mark the pages temporarily (sticky notes are less likely to fall out). 

2 Concentrate on beginnings and endings

Read the introduction or preface
This can be a good way of establishing the author's main ideas.
Usually authors give signposts to the most important parts of their writing.
Make a note of any key quotations (with the page number).

Skip to the end and read the conclusion
This should help you confirm what the author's main ideas are.
Again make a note of any key quotations. 

Summarise the key ideas in your own words.

Go back to the contents page **Ditch the book?** 
Decide whether you need to read any more of the book.

3 If you decide to read more

Check the index for other relevant material
You might go back to these bits later if you have time, so make a note of the pages.

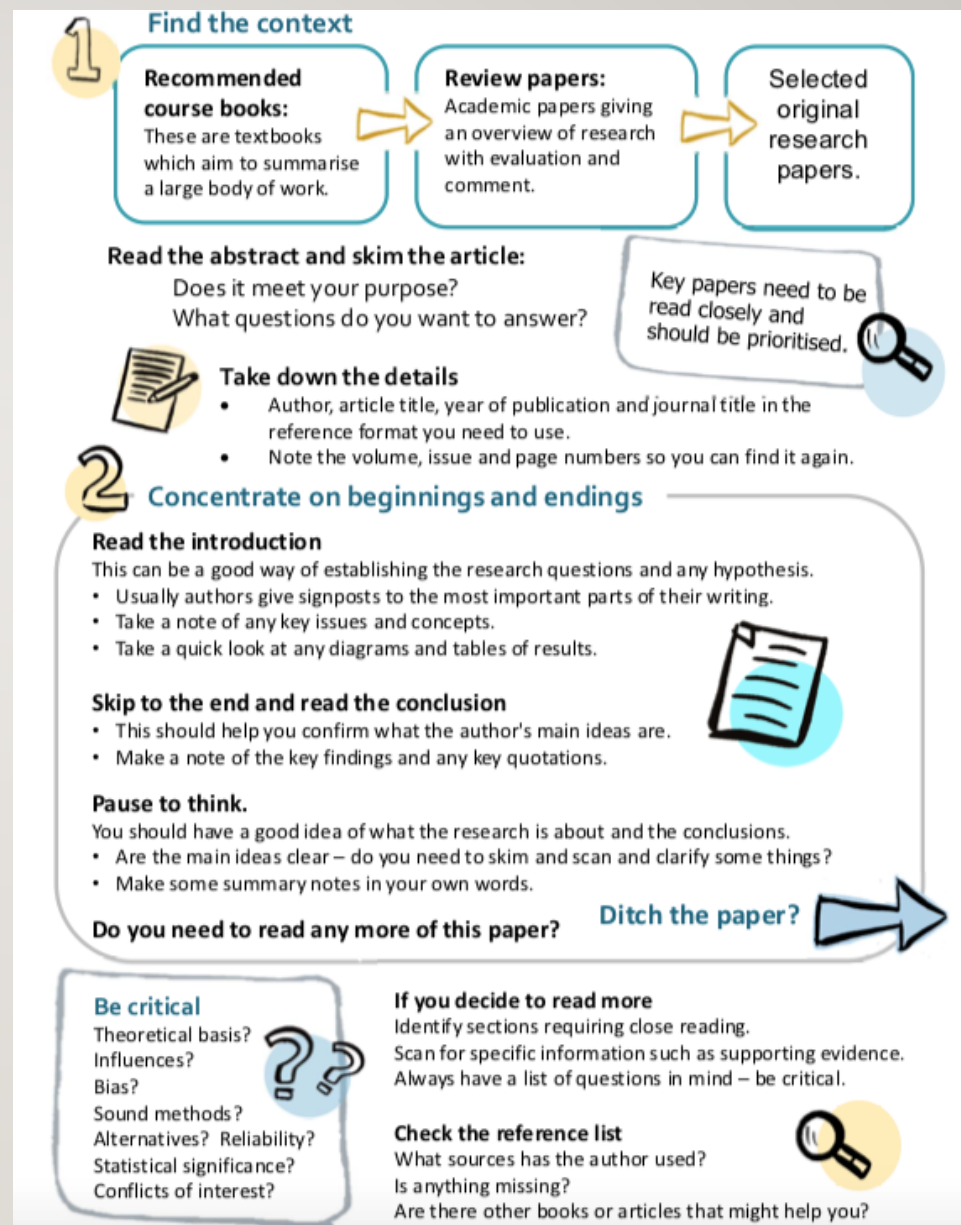
Skim through the sections you marked.
Look for section headings.
Read first and last paragraphs.
Look out for any diagrams or illustrations.

Keep your key questions in mind. 

READING A RESEARCH PAPER

Further information:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/study-hub/learning-resources/reading>



SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

Remember to sign up
for our other skills
sessions!

