

# How to learn efficiently

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# Understanding yourself

Understanding yourself will make study easier and more enjoyable.

At school or at work, other people control what you do and when you do it. You may not be aware of your natural, daily rhythm and how you like to learn:

- Working in a small group
- Not just listening, but also doing
- Time to discuss ideas with others
- The teacher is enthusiastic
- I can be creative
- I can listen and look together
- The subject motivates me
- There is a set goal
- I have good relationships with students and teachers

There are morning people and night people.<sup>1</sup>

Do you work best:

- On your own
- In a group or with a buddy
- Surrounded by your resources
- Away from any clutter
- In different locations?

Find out what suits YOU as soon as you can. It may not be the same as your friends, and it's ok to be different. However, it may be good to change it up occasionally.

**Assignment deadlines tend to cluster around the middle and end of semester**, requiring planning.

It helps to know if you are driven by *deadlines* or do you *freeze* when under pressure?

Some people are happy to work on all their assignments at once, reading and writing over several weeks. They compartmentalise or find it helps them to think across several subjects.

Other people need to focus on one assignment at a time, and planning a block of time to work on each assignment becomes important.

A few people can “bash them out” at the last minute and still get an A. However, they have usually been in the lectures and doing plenty of reading and thinking.

**Most people need a plan and plenty of time.**

It is not how fast you read, but how much you *remember* and how well you *think* about what you read.

Speed and intelligence are *not* linked. The important thing is to know *how much* time **YOU** need.

**Getting help is important.** We all need help at some point.

There are many ways to get help:

- Talk to students in your class
- Ask questions in class
- Approach the teacher or email them
- Join a study group, and get help from other students
- Reach out to SASS<sup>2</sup> for help on an individual level
- Use online resources
- Ask the library staff for help with resources.
- Access study guides and self-help manuals.

You will probably use several ways to get help. See the Student Support tab on CareyOnline:



Student Support

which lists help available.

Challenge yourself to ask outside your comfort zone occasionally.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rdworldonline.com/study-finds-night-owl-gene-variant/>

<sup>2</sup> Student Association

## WHERE TO STUDY?

You can study at home or on campus. For some students, their home can be distracting with small children, parents, or household chores waiting.

At Carey, the library offers group study areas, areas to study *quietly* with friends, and quiet, solo study areas. Some students enjoy studying in the dining room. Find the place that works for you.<sup>3</sup>

Here are nine tips for a good study environment:

1. Is it free from distractions, like TV and phone? (multi-tasking is reduces efficiency on the primary task).<sup>4</sup>
2. Do you have a good size desk and comfortable chair?
3. Is there adequate heating, lighting, and ventilation?
4. Are there shelves for books, folders, etc.?
5. Do you have space for calendar, diary, timetables, etc.?
6. Can you access reference books and other essential resources?
7. A lot of students study in the sun, lying on their bed, or in front of the TV. Ask yourself: *why am I studying here?* It may be nice, a pleasant change etc., but rarely are those places very effective for study. The best place is probably at your desk, close to your resources. Plan to study hard for a set amount of time and then enjoy the sun, TV, or whatever.
8. Know your body patterns. You will know if you are a morning person or evening person. When do you study the best, maintain the best concentration, etc.? Most people have a peak of mental activity in the middle to late morning, a physical peak in the middle of the afternoon. Do you work best in public with others or in your own room? *Find out.*
9. Start your study at a regular time each day. Get into a routine that works for you, and stick to it. **Treat study like going to work.** You have set hours and would like to get through X amount of work. This means deciding beforehand what and when you will study. Do not study only when you are in the right frame of mind because you may never feel like it!

## How to manage your time

**Time management and planning** are essential skills to learn, here are several ideas on how to do *time management*—pick one that suits you.

Every semester some students try and do three assignments in the last week...

This produces huge stress and poor outcomes.

*“Research shows a strong correlation between self-discipline and academic achievement.”<sup>5</sup>*

## GETTING STARTED

Top students have a study timetable of some sort. They know **what** they need to do, **how** to do it, and, importantly, **when** they will do it. Do you?

<sup>3</sup> For ideas of how to decide what suits you; Louise Tamblin and Pat Ward, *The Smart Study Guide: Psychological Techniques for Student Success* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 13-26.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.verywellmind.com/multitasking-2795003>

<sup>5</sup> Zimmerman, B., & Kitsantas, A. “Comparing students’ self-discipline and self-regulation measures and their prediction of academic achievement,” *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 39 (2014), 145-155.

## HOW TO PLAN

### THE BASICS

**On a weekly, monthly, or yearly planner** write in due dates of assignments etc. Put this somewhere where you can easily glance at it often. Courses at Carey are generally 15 credits in value, which is equivalent to around 150 hours of learning. These courses will have various due dates for assessments, so be sure you know when work is due. This should make it easy to plan your study timetable.

**Plan regular rests**, (distractions like TV, Facebook, and calls to friends). During study time try putting your phone on silent. Guard your study time jealously, and use your rest time well. Play sports, keep fit, eat well, and read devotional literature. Sleep is especially important. Make sure that your life is balanced.

**Set goals for yourself**—short, medium, and long-term: “By this date I will complete this assignment.” It may help to have a friend or mentor to hold you to account on this. Each week, check how the plan is going. This may be a new skill for you; it will take time to work out how much time you need for assignments, reading, etc. Your plan should help you, not set you up to fail.<sup>6</sup>

### THE TIME MANAGEMENT CYCLE

Time management “systems” often fail because people are perfectionist or have unrealistic expectations. Most people don’t start time management until they’re falling behind. They use time management as a means of catching up. Their first plans cram in everything they must do without considering the time required for each task. This is an expression of motivation for change, but they often cannot sustain their intended pace and abandon the plan altogether: “Planning does not work for me!”

But **you do not have to be perfect** to achieve your goals.

Try a cyclical system **early** in the academic year:

This time management cycle came from York University:

- **Start** with goal setting to establish a context for managing time.
- **Next** track your time and develop an awareness for where you spend your time.
- **Now** plan, this could include to-do lists, weekly plans, monthly plans, and longer-range plans.
- **Self-monitoring** is noticing how well you are working your plan, how accurately you have planned, how well you have forecasted for various events and so on (adaptation is vital in student success).
- **The final phase** is changing where you spend your time to better match your intended use of time (less you tube—more reading) in which you make corrections to the system before starting the cycle again at goal setting.

This cycle permits you to start a process of *gradual*, performance-based improvement in time management skill.

Resist the urge to cast aside strategies that do not produce instant results. Everybody wants a ‘quick fix’, but changing our behaviour takes time!

These websites have more information, and the first is focused on distance students:

<https://www.massey.ac.nz/study/about-postgraduate-study/masters-study/skills-needed-for-postgraduate-study/#Timemanagement>

<https://www.waikato.ac.nz/teaching-and-learning/student-learning/assignments/time-management>  
(Te reo resources available)

RMIT has good materials as well. Here is a short video on time management:

<https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/managing-my-time>

Here is their tutorial: <https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/time-management-tools>

Click on **assignment planning tool**, and you can use their plan generator.

<sup>6</sup> This book has a handy checklist for assessing your plan, and plenty of examples: Emmanuel Manalo and Julie Trafford, *Head Start: How to succeed in tertiary studies* (Auckland: Pearson Education, 2003).

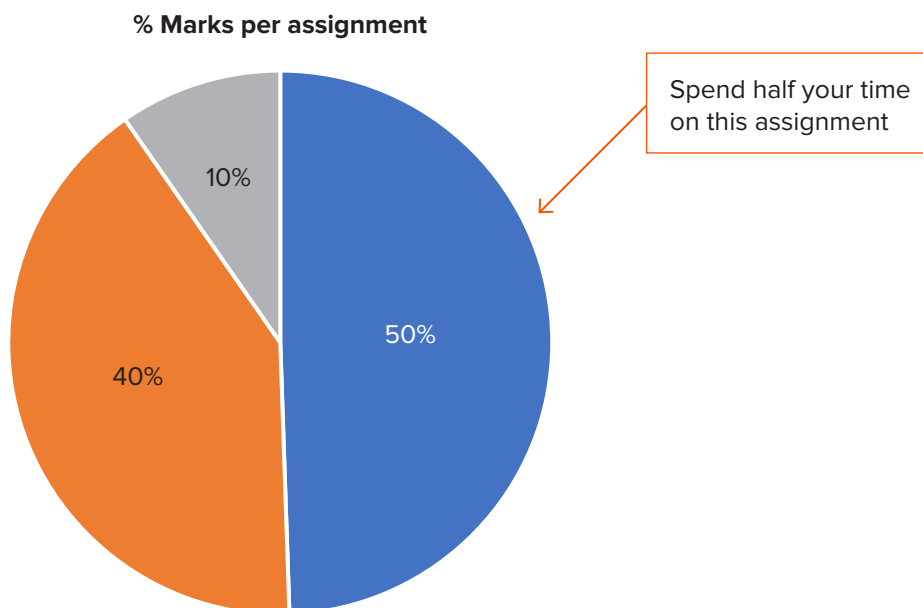
## TIME PLANNING PRIORITIES

In any course there will be a set percentage of marks for each assignment, and any other test/s.

**Study the guidelines**, and work out where you need to spend most of your time in relation to where most of the percentage is. If the tests are worth 10% and the essays 40% and 50%, then you need to spend more time on the essays.

You will find these guidelines in your course outline available on CareyOnline.

**Remember**, although allocated weekly readings and note-taking in classes are not marked, they do constitute great resources for your assignments. So, it is important not to neglect them.



## COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS

**Adult education is different from high school.** The course notes or classes will not always take you step-by-step through every aspect of a subject. Rather they will provide an *overview* of the topic and zoom in on a few specifics. You must supplement the classes and course notes with the assigned reading. Ask questions on any area that you found hard to understand. Do not worry about a question appearing basic. If you want to know, there will be others who also need to know. You can always put questions to the teacher using the online forums for each class.

**Adult education is largely self-help.** While Carey staff are here to help in any way possible, *you are responsible for your learning*. Gain the necessary skills of research, note-taking, and information sorting, as quickly as possible.

**Adult education can be a community undertaking.** Study groups are encouraged, SASS is able to provide student to student help. There is *academic support* for Māori and Pacifica students. The library staff can help, and you can always email your teacher or make an appointment to see them.

# Note-taking

## HOW TO LEARN EFFICIENTLY

- How well do you learn from listening?
- How many notes should you take?
- What do you do with your notes once you have made them?

Your course may involve attending a class or reading and working through course notes and attending a weekly lesson run by a tutor as part of a small group. This means you must be able to both read and listen well, to make good notes. We will first examine listening skills and then move on to some reading skills related to note-taking.

### LISTENING SKILLS

The skill of listening is something that varies with everyone. However, it is a skill that can be improved. There are three aspects of listening.

**1. Hearing:** the physical aspect of receiving sounds.

**2. Tuning in:** focusing in on the topic's dimensions.

**3. Being involved:** the thinking processes of:

- relating
- linking
- associating
- integrating
- remembering

**Tuning in:** Focus is easier if you have done the weekly readings for each class, which are posted online. Each lecture/class also has objectives or *learning outcomes* that are covered in the online course outline. The teacher may not cover all the notes in class, so you should come prepared to have difficult or obscure points clarified, and to dig deeper into the meaning of the topic. *Don't come to the lecture just to listen. Come to be involved.*

**Being involved:** This is the *thinking* part. Be prepared to ask a few pertinent questions during the sessions. With the information you receive from the lecture you want to actively process it. Relate the information to what you know, link, make associations, integrate the specifics into the big picture.

### NOTE-TAKING IN LECTURES

1. **Flexibility** is required. Different teachers and different subjects require differing amounts of information to be taken down.
2. **Notes** should be **as full as possible**. It is easier to cull information out of notes than to add it in. Handwritten notes enable a point-for-point record of the class, getting the main points down, along with sub points. This *does not mean a word-for-word* record of the class as often happens when students use a laptop, this is not an effective way to learn.<sup>7</sup> However, some forms of note taking suit using a laptop.
3. **Use abbreviations** to speed your notes while still being able to read them.
4. **Space your notes well**. There is nothing worse than little cramped notes that you can hardly read at a later stage. Space them well, leave a lot of room between points and ideas (often the teacher will give subsequent information about a previous point!).

<sup>7</sup> For an academic study on why taking verbatim notes does not work as well see: <https://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away>

5. Underline headings, use highlighters, circle key concepts, use \* and bullet points. Whatever it takes to make your notes:
  - clear
  - easy to read
  - and separates the MAIN points from sub points
6. Just don't make the page too busy or confusing.
7. **What suits YOU.** There are many ways to take notes, some are very formal, and others are more creative. Check out some alternatives online:

<https://collegeinfo geek.com/how-to-take-notes-in-college> (here is a short video)

Here is an example of a more visual method:

(By wonderfullife.com)

THE TITLE GOES AT THE TOP OF THE NOTE (JUST SAYIN')  
**NOTETAKING 101**

→ THERE SHOULD BE A DATE, OOPS!  
 YOUR NOTES ARE YOURS, THEY'LL BE BY YOUR SIDE @ EXAM TIME... SO MAKE 'EM GOOD GREAT!

**Pre-Lecture**

- Glance over the readings
- Know the main concepts

Don't worry about making your notes pretty DURING lecture, you'll miss valuable information!

Messy notes are beautiful too!

USE ARROWS TO CONNECT IDEAS (OR DON'T)

**During Lecture** (Use a simple font for headers)

**DEFINITIONS:** don't just copy the slide, listen for the professors deeper meaning

I highlight definition titles

USE UPPERCASE, underlines, italics, or CURLIVE

- This is what a main point looks like

- ↳ A subpoint
- Maybe there's even more points needed

* * Keywords	Further Information
* * * Ex. Pedagogy	Use the Cornell Method (if you prefer) ↓ ↓ ↓ Friere, Giroux: "learning about learning" (Expand this however long you'd like)

\* If a prof repeats something, WRITE IT DOWN!

\* If you're rushing to write it all, you're writing too much  
 BEING CONCISE IS A GREAT SKILL!

**Post-Lecture To-Dos**

- \* Reread your notes, make them pretty, mind map, etc.
- \* Get clarification on the things you don't understand
- \* Fill in the gaps (with info. from the text, etc.)

→ Designate Examples to a different pen colour

→ Keep hi-lighters close by

## GOING OVER YOUR NOTES

A few hints:

1. **Weekly notes** should be *re-read and learned the same day you took them*. The content is still clear in your mind, and you can consolidate the information.
2. **Re-write your lecture notes the same day**. This does not mean completely re-writing, but it involves:
  - Sorting out the *main ideas* from the detail.
  - Identifying *key words* which link things together.
  - Composing diagrams, making side comments, summaries, bringing essential elements together, showing the relationship between one thing and another; in other words, *personalising* your learning.
  - Reading *references* that have been given to broaden your knowledge beyond the notes.

If you leave space in your notes as you go, it is easier to add summaries and other material later.

3. **Use the discussion forums**, here you can ask questions arising from a class, and start discussions on the topic. This has the added advantage of helping distance students to feel connected.

**Find out *what works best for you given the time constraints you have.***

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

- University of Nottingham (UK): <https://www.slideshare.net/panicpete/listening-to-lectures-10623996>

**If you *do* take handwritten notes, take comfort in the knowledge that the process of mentally engaging with the lecturer as you make notes will—*on its own*—aid your memory even if you *never look at them again.***

## FINALLY

**Teach** what you are learning to one another and to anyone who happens to be within earshot. Throughout the week go over what you have learned with family and friends.

**If you can teach it correctly, then you have learned it correctly.**



# Reading: when to read

## HOW MUCH SHOULD I READ?

Most students complain about the amount of reading they are asked to do.

Reading is IMPORTANT—it is the *main* way that you get information at a tertiary level.

Each 15-credit course is *150 hours of work*. Your course may tell you how many hours you need to spend on reading. For example, in *Mission of God*, the hours spent reading are *more* than the hours spent in lectures (36 hours are spent in lectures).

### READING BEFORE THE LECTURE

The course outline usually gives weekly readings. These readings are often from the course text or may be posted online so you download a PDF.

Check out any other material the teacher has put on CareyOnline. Even if you just skim read, you will understand the lecture better.

Sometimes teachers post videos, and watching these can help.

### READING AFTER THE LECTURE

Finish any reading you missed.

- Check out the notes for the week on CareyOnline. Sometimes teachers do not cover all the material for the week in class, and the additional material there will supplement your study.
- You should also review any readings recommended in the lecture or handouts given during the lecture.
- Look over your notes and modify them if necessary.

This will make sure you get the most from lectures and will help with assignments.

### READING FOR ASSIGNMENTS

Many students only read for assignments.

This makes studying for assignments harder than it needs to be.

If you have done the set readings for each lecture, you will have a background understanding of the course and the topics covered and will have less to read for assignments. You will also have a much better idea about where to find the information you need.

BEFORE you start reading know what information you need.

## HOW MANY BOOKS TO READ?

During a course at Carey, especially by distance, you will be required to read a lot of books. Unfortunately, *many students read far too many books!* Or to be more specific, they read far too many of the wrong books. Furthermore, they often read them in the wrong way. What a waste of time! The next two sections look at where to find the best resources<sup>8</sup> and how to read them when you have found them.

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<sup>8</sup> The teacher will tell you how many books and articles you need. Reading a few more can be helpful, but too many may not improve an essay.

# Reading: what to read

## CHOOSING WHAT TO READ FOR ASSIGNMENTS

**Teachers recommend material:** they are the people who will mark your work and who decide what they would like you to know and understand. *So where do you find what they recommend?*

- On your **course outline**, there is usually a class on the assignment topic, and that week's reading should help.
- The **extra resources** for that week on CareyOnline.
- The **bibliography** for the course will list the books that are especially important for assignments, along with books for the entire course.
- Also, be sure to check out the **closed reserve** in the library.
- When the teacher **talks about the assignment** in class, they will usually **recommend** books.
- Sometimes the assignment has a **smaller bibliography attached** or other recommendations and useful resources **posted with the assignment** on CareyOnline.
- If not—or if you forget—you can **ask** for recommendations.

**Please check out all these resources first, as it saves a lot of time and effort.**

## FINDING ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Finding books or journal articles can be daunting at first (see the library modules for details of how to locate resources by keywords, etc.).

### Some handy hints:

- **Check** out the shelf that a recommended text comes from. It will have similar topics, this is called “shelf browsing”.
- **Look** for books by the same author (academics often write both simple and advanced texts).
- **Check** out the footnotes in a recommended text for books the author has referenced in writing the book.
- **Learn** to use the **Tūhuratanga** search on **OpenAthens** and how it links to the library catalogue.
- **ASK** other students, librarians, SASS, teachers, etc.

## JOURNAL ARTICLES

Most students find journals hard, so these tips will help (also see the Library Module on Journals):

- Teachers often provide any essential articles on CareyOnline, so remember to check there!
- The library has a good range of current journals on the shelves, with back copies filed next to the Chinese collection.
- Academics who write books usually also write articles, so search on **Tūhuratanga** by author.
- Learn the secrets of keyword searching.

Journals cause EVERYONE problems. So, practice ahead of time, then when you are running late it will not be the first time you have used *Tūhuratanga* or *OpenAthens*.

### WHAT TYPE OF BOOKS TO READ?

Remembering some easy rules will make your life easier.

Often the teacher will tell you *what type* of books or articles they recommend.

<p>Start with general books that define topics and move on to books or articles that are specific to your topic:</p>	<p>Start with introductions and move on to academic books (they have bibliography and footnotes):</p>	<p>Articles are the same, starting with magazines and moving on to peer reviewed journals:</p>
<p><b>General</b> ↓ Dictionaries/ Encyclopaedias Commentaries Systematic theology <b>Specific</b> ↓ Monographs (one topic)</p>	<p><b>Popular</b> ↓ Comedian’s Guide to Theology Guides for the perplexed NIVAC commentaries <b>Academic</b> ↓ Systematic theology WORD commentaries</p>	<p><b>Magazine</b> ↓ Christianity Today <b>Journals</b> ↓ Crux <b>Peer reviewed</b> ↓ Scottish Journal of Theology</p>

Check out the *date of publication*. Generally, the teachers are looking for recent scholarship on a topic. There are exceptions, such as classics and important authors (you will learn who they are).

Here are some examples of how to move from one level to another.

From simple to complex or from a whole book of the bible to a specific passage.

<p><b>Exegesis:</b></p> <p>↓ Introduction to New/Old Testament Dictionary/Encyclopedia Commentaries ↓ Monograph on a topic of interest</p>	<p><b>Theology essay:</b></p> <p>↓ Simple guide to theology Systematic Theology Particular theologian ↓ Particular topic</p>
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If you are struggling with a topic, *read a popular introduction*. It will give you some of the terms and help you understand the academic books on the topic.

If you can’t understand a book, **STOP!** There is always another author, or an easier level.

**Better to write well what you DO understand, rather than use terms in the wrong way.**

# Reading: how to read for information

## HOW TO READ BOOKS—OR—HOW TO AVOID READING BOOKS!<sup>9</sup>

So how do we read?

The aim of a smart student is to read as little as possible to gain maximum benefit.

In this section, we will try to help you to read your chosen books as efficiently and effectively as possible.

### HOW TO AVOID READING BOOKS

There are four stages to survey a book to decide which chapter or section is relevant to your assignment:

1. **Contents page:** take a few minutes to read through. This will tell you what the book is about and how it is organised. It will also indicate which chapters might be significant.
2. **Chapter:** Skim read the *introductory* paragraph. It should tell you what the chapter is about. Then *headings* are useful in understanding how the chapter is structured and which parts are relevant. Finally, *the last paragraph* should sum up the chapter.
3. **Beginnings, endings, and headings:** Foreword (or Prologue or Introduction) is where the author (or editor) tells you what the book is about. In an academic book, the introduction may have an outline of each chapter. Here, you decide if the book is relevant to your topic. The conclusion or epilogue (especially the last few paragraphs) should give you a summary of the book. Headings are useful in finding the section of interest.
4. **Charts, tables and diagrams:** summarise information, they are always worth a look.

### READING THE IMPORTANT PARTS!

Then read carefully the parts that you think are most relevant.

Now you are reading effectively. You won't read the whole book or even a complete chapter, but you will get a good idea of what is in it. Often, this is better than if you had scanned each of the words.

If you try to read page-by-page, the material is often forgotten five minutes later. Such reading is a waste of time—don't do it!

Sometimes with the way of reading described above you will read some parts twice. But they will be sections that *really matter*.

### HOW DO WE APPLY THIS METHOD TO REAL BOOKS?

**Dictionary/Encyclopaedia:** check out several *keywords* to see which entry looks most relevant. There are many types of dictionaries and encyclopaedia, so use the most relevant ones.

**Introductory text:** do not read it all, just the parts that give you relevant information. These are good for pictures, charts, and diagrams.

**Commentary:** check out the introduction, structure of the book, and the introduction to any section in the book. But the specific passage you are working on will need to be read in detail.

**Systematic theology:** covers everything! Just read the part you need.

**Monograph:** even a book on a single topic will have much information of no use to you. Find the good stuff and read ONLY that.

**Journal articles:** have an abstract, which will tell you if it is of any use. If so, read the introduction and conclusion. The detailed argument in the middle may not help at all unless you need a specific point. Articles should have sub-headings, so use them.

<sup>9</sup> This material comes from Tim Bulkeley, a former lecturer.

## READING SKILLS

Many people emerge from school with the idea that it is clever to be able to read a book once, and to have absorbed all the information within it. This is a *myth!* Some books must be read slowly, others quickly, and some not at all. The best type of reading is *flexible* reading, being able to adjust your speed to your need. The most important thing to remember is to *think about your reading in terms of outcomes*:

- I want to learn it, or commit it all to memory.
- I want to get the gist of it, a broad overview.
- I want to support my argument to get evidence.
- I want to find out what happened next.
- I want to be able to answer an exam question on the topic.
- I want to refresh my memory.
- I want a range of opinions on the topic.
- I am hunting for concrete facts and figures.

Obviously *how* you read something will depend on *why* you are reading it.

### READ FASTER?

Many people believe the eyes move smoothly across a page with only an occasional interruption. This is false. Our eyes take in a few letters, between seven and nine, at one go. Though, faster readers use peripheral vision to anticipate, and it is possible to train your brain to do this.<sup>10</sup>

Reading speed varies with the type of material. Despite much publicity for “speed reading” (ultra-fast reading), academic studies demonstrate that as reading speed increases, comprehension drops. As a student, if you are not taking in the information it is a waste of time.<sup>11</sup> One way to increase your speed of reading is to **expand your vocabulary**. Learn the meaning of new vocabulary that occurs in notes and in lectures. The better your vocabulary, the faster you will be able to read *and* understand.

**Read with a purpose in mind, and do not read all material in the same way.**

<sup>10</sup> <https://schoolbag.info/literature/speed/4.html>

<sup>11</sup> Thorin Klosowski, “Is Speed Reading Bullshit?” *Lifehacker*. <https://lifehacker.com/the-truth-about-speed-reading-1542508398>