Top 10 tips for reading and notemaking

At university much of your time will be spent reading texts of various types. Here are some top 10 things you should know for effective reading. Notemaking when reading is particularly effective.

1. Learnt skills.
Reading and note making are skills that you can learn.

2. Read with a purpose.
Read with a purpose and you can make your reading more efficient. This means looking at the tutorial questions or lecture topics before you start, reading actively and thinking critically.

3. Reading strategy.
All text types are written with a particular audience in mind. This means you read a textbook, journal articles and newspapers all differently, and each requires a different reading strategy.

4. Read the last page first.
Academic texts are written to a formula and are very structured. They often present two or more points of view on a topic for you to think about. There are no surprises. Unlike reading a novel, reading the last page first is a good idea.

5. You don’t need to read every word.
First, preview the text. Skim the conclusion and introduction to find the thesis, aim, or purpose of the text. (e.g., The aim of this ... is; This paper argues ...)

6. Read the title, headings and sub-headings first.
Read the conclusion followed by the introduction. Lastly, read the first paragraph of each section and the first sentence in each subsequent paragraph to establish the flow of the text (e.g., First, Second, Third: In addition, For example, Furthermore, etc.)

7. Use a pen or pencil.
It is more efficient to read with a pen or pencil than a highlighter. If you use highlighters, use three or more colours and have a system. Highlighters only help you locate text. Your notes can help you remember why you thought that section of text was important when you were reading it.

8. Avoid plagiarism
Avoid plagiarism by making notes and writing out the full details of the text (e.g., for a book: Author, Year, Title, Location of publication, and Publisher). If copying text word for word write the page number and use quotation marks (i.e., “......................” (Smith, 2000, p. 1)

9. Reading for understanding requires effort.
You may need to read another source to help you understand concepts. Develop a strategy for reading difficult material.

10. Set a limit.
Set time limits for each of your readings (e.g., 15-20 minutes for each text in one seating)

Watch the video
This video shows techniques for note taking from the University College and Bepko Learning Center Study.

Study Guide: Note Taking (YouTube)