# ACTIVE READING: READING EFFECTIVELY

For most students, reading takes time – and engaging in critical thinking and note taking lengthens that time significantly. We need to think carefully, therefore, about how we read. Horn (2009) distinguishes between three different types of reading – or really the different functions that reading can play:

1. Reading for detailed content
2. Exploratory reading – to see if something is potentially useful
3. Critical reading – where you engage in ‘Active Reading’ (See Horn, R., 2009, *The Business Skills Handbook,* London, CIPD.)

The former is noted by Horn as important for your core textbooks, as it assists in understanding the core ideas for a subject. Exploratory reading is where time can often be saved. The function of exploratory reading is to give you a very quick overview of what has been written and often takes the form of skim reading. The third – taking the form of recognising the assumptions, strengths and weaknesses of a piece of written work – is necessary so that you can demonstrate the kinds of thinking that will lead to higher grades and increased employability.

But even in recognising these ideas, there is still a need to think about how we can read quickly and effectively. Many advocate a method called **SQ3R**:

**S**urvey (find out quickly what the passage is about)

**Q**uestion (think about what the passage says and ask critical questions: why do they say this?; what is the evidence?; what are the assumptions?)

**R**ead (read the detail and pick out the answers to the questions, making notes as you do so),

**R**ecall (reading out loud what you have written as notes, or drawing a mind map so that it becomes more memorable)

**R**eview (read your notes again a short while later to ensure you understand them)

As noted above, taking notes from your reading is vital, but the above will ensure two things:

1. That you have some good notes which will help your own critical thinking about a topic.
2. That using those notes with the SQ3R method will help you remember what you have read.

This helps ensure that your reading is effective, but does not guarantee how efficient it is (in terms of time). We need to think of some other techniques to assist you here, but here are some quick dos and don’ts.

**You need to …**

* Ensure that everything you need is accessible to you, including pen and paper
* Practise your skim reading – ask a friend to time you and then reduce the time you give yourself to read the same passage
* Keep a list of new and important words that you have come across
* Continue to practise and improve your reading speed
* Highlight and underline where reasonable
* Take breaks in your reading – but watch for procrastination

**You should avoid …**

* Spending more time on getting everything together than you spend on reading
* Reading every word – most of the time, you can get reading done quickly by picking out the key words rather than reading every word.
* Reading a passage aloud or moving your finger over every word – this takes up time unnecessarily
* Highlighting and underlining everything – doing so will potentially be confusing and difficult to deal with when it comes to reading for revision

## Speed Reading

Most people seem to read at around 200–300 words per minute (wpm) when trying to understand something, but an ideal speed for reading a significant amount should be closer to 500–600 wpm.

**Have a look at the essay below (the same one given in Chapter 4, but this time without any highlighting). There are 905 words here. How long does it take you to read? Set your stopwatch and start reading now.**

*‘To what extent does Maslow’s theory of human needs explain individuals’ motivation?’*

Maslow’s theory – called the Hierarchy of Needs – sets out a number of levels around which motivation takes place. The basic concept that Maslow had was to indicate that in order to reach the next level of motivation, the previous level would need to be satisfied. Some examples are given below.

The first level relates to physiological needs. These are needs of food and drink and physical health as well as sex and sleep, so for example, when someone is struggling to find food, they will look hard for it. This level was seen by Maslow as the most basic because without such biological needs being fulfilled, there would be no individual to motivate anyway (Johnson, 2003). It could be possible that certain physiological needs may be more important at different times and some individuals seem to be able to need less sleep than others, of course, and some may wish to abstain from fulfilling certain physiological needs from time to time (e.g. Ramadan).

The second level relates to safety and security – which means we are secure in our situation, but according to Maslow, we are only motivated to fulfil all our safety needs when we have fulfilled our physiological ones, so for example, someone will search for a safe place to live, once they are sure they have enough food to eat. This is because a feeling of contentment and personal security is seen by most employees at work as being less important than the search for food, or need for sleep or drink etc. (McKenna, 2002). The importance or nature of this need may vary in the same way that physiological needs may vary: job security may be seen as irrelevant to someone whose need for a place to stay is as much of an issue. It is also possible that individuals may feel content in certain aspects of their lives (e.g. at home) but insecure in other situations (e.g. at work): in such a situation, the individual might seek another job, perhaps, but this issue also applies to the third need – that of belonging.

The value of such ideas is enhanced by recognising that Herzberg’s (1959) findings include some similar ideas. The fact that safety is included in Herzberg’s model – and even the naming by Herzberg of such ideas as ‘hygiene’ factors – goes some way to showing that such factors do indeed have an impact on motivation. It is possible to then argue that organisational cultures which seem to place less emphasis on safety might be seen as struggling to motivate their employees.

Maslow’s third need was a sense of belonging and community with other people – for example, being part of a good team at work or feeling part of a group or a family. Workers at Foxconn are strongly motivated by this, according to Purcell (2001). Again, Maslow said we are only motivated by this when our safety and physiological needs are fulfilled. Why is this need important? According to Maslow, this is because we have a human need to engage in activities with other people and to feel recognised and valued (Maslow, 1957). Taking the example given above, it is possible to imagine a situation where an individual might feel more of a sense of belonging in certain situations than in others, and so may prioritise their activities according to where they feel the highest needs are met – i.e. would start to enjoy work less and spend more time at home. Certainly, Elton Mayo’s work in the 1930s with the Hawthorne Studies indicated that group identity and a sense of belonging was a big issue for industrial psychologists, but it is true that personality theory also suggests that some are more or less inclined to need the company of others in life generally.

Fourthly (and closely related to belonging needs), we have esteem needs, where we get our intrinsic sense of self-worth, self-identity and personal value: someone having self-confidence will not need to seek more of that and so that need may be fulfilled whereas someone who is seeking approval from others will always be doing so in order to develop that sense of self-esteem. Again, this is necessary because without that sense of value, we may not believe that achieving our full potential is possible (or rather that we have little potential anyway). Recognition from others also acts as a catalyst for even greater achievements (Marsden, 2010).

Some suggest (Stephens, 1995) that you could have a sense of self-esteem without fulfilling your belonging needs – i.e. through tackling problems on your own – or even have self-esteem without fulfilling the lower order needs (physiological or safety).

Maslow’s argument was that once we have that sense of self-esteem, we are motivated to fulfill our self-actualisation needs and a sense that anything is possible, thus achieving all that we wish to and being ‘self-actualised’. This means that all that we set out to achieve has been completed. Of course, rarely do individuals achieve this, but recognising that there is more to do and that there is a challenge and personal reward in stretching further can drive behaviour in a very productive manner. In many ways, this is a theoretical concept and the idea is often proposed that we never become fully ‘self-actualised’: if we did, there would be little which would motivate us to undertake further activity.

**At a normal speed, this would have taken you around 3**–**4 minutes. How long did it take you?**

One quick tip: When you are reading a journal article or piece of research, always read the abstract and introduction first. There is no point in reading further if the research is poor quality research or the article is not relevant.