Active Reading

What are passive readers?
Passive readers read to complete an assignment without comprehending or working with the information:
- Don’t know why they are reading
- Reads to get it done
- Cannot wait to finish
- Cannot remember what they read
- Don’t ask questions while reading
- Finishes without reflecting on the material or the process

What are active readers?
Active readers read with a purpose, focus, and organization by taking notes and reflecting on the process:
- Read with a purpose in mind
- Bring personal knowledge and experience to the text
- Mark the text using their own note-taking system
- Summarize and organize information for future use
- Ask questions before and after reading
- Reflect on the information and the reading process

Reading actively means understanding the basic and complex parts of a text and how these parts work together to create meaning.
- You should engage in an active dialogue with the text wherein you make a ‘discovery.’
- After that dialogue, you should be able to argue your ‘discovery’ through writing.

Keys to Success
In order to help you stay in reading actively, follow these keys to success:

Determine your purpose. Think about how you will use the information in this text. Are you reading to learn a new concept? Relearn a concept? Reinforce what you already know? Are you reading to gain information? Will you need to use this information later on an assignment or exam? Will you need to repeat this information? Use it as evidence for an argument? Refute it? Knowing your purpose will also tell you if you need to read, skim, or scan the text.

Preview the text. First, situate yourself in the text.
- Locate and research the publication and author information
- Read the titles and subtitles
- Skim the introduction and conclusion
- Create several pre-reading questions based on the assignment
Research unfamiliar words and allusions. When you find something unfamiliar in a text, you should be excited because that means you are about to learn something new. To help you turn the unfamiliar into something familiar:

- Use an academic dictionary to look up unfamiliar words
- Click on hyperlinks inside electronic texts
- Use popular search engines for quick research on allusions
- Look up allusions in an academic encyclopedia or quick word search

Annotate the text. Making notes about a text is crucial for an active reader. These notes will help to jump start the critical thinking process and function as reminders later on. When making notes about a text:

Do not's
- Mark passages without making a note about it
- Mark as you read rather than after a second pass through
- Leave notes on the text without keeping a reading journal

Do's
- Mark passages that are interesting or confusing
- Make notes on the text and in your notebook
- Write down quotes / ideas that you would like to return to later

Summarize and analyze the information. When put a text into your own words, you are able to internalize the information. Two methods to help you:

Summary
- Write down the author's thesis, main points, and conclusions.
- Discuss types of evidence
- Determine the purpose of the text

Analysis
- Determine the effectiveness of text
- Evaluate the author's use of evidence
- Assess whether or not the author achieves his/her purpose

Reflect on the material and the process. Lastly, you will want to keep a reading journal or notebook that contains your thoughts on what you have just read. This will help to jog your memory when you return to the information later.

Here are some questions to help you get started:
- What did I learn?
- What do I still need to know?
- Did I learn what I needed to?
- Does the text have references or further reading to help me?

By engaging in metacognition, you will find ways to connect to the information and better articulate what you learned from it. Answering these questions will also help you to further strengthen areas of your reading process that are working and improve those that still need some work.