

Practice Activity 3: Verbal Recaps

This tool is a habit-changer which will very quickly boost your understanding. Of all the activities here, it's the one that takes only a little effort but can yield big results – so it's well worth a try next time you have something you need to read through.

Here's what you do. Every time you read a page of a textbook or study guide, stop and then:

1. Close the book.
2. Calm your mind for a second and think – *what did I just read?*
3. Now talk aloud, summarising in your own words exactly what you've just been reading. Choose one of these starters to get you going if it helps:
 - “The writer has just been explaining that...”
 - “This section explores...”
 - “The important idea here is that...”
 - “This page outlines the importance of...”
 - “The writer's argument here is that...”
 - “I've been reading about how...”
 - “I've learnt that...”
4. If you can't summarise it clearly...there's been a problem. Not to worry. Go back and read the section again, and repeat step 3.
5. Once you're happy you can summarise the content, try asking and answering more complex questions; not 'what', but 'why' or 'how'. Try these:

“Why is this section important? Because...”

“Why has it been included? Well, it's crucial because...”

“Why is this bit detailed... or why isn't it detailed? I guess it's because...”

“Why is the information in this order? The writer covers this first/second/third because...”

“How does it relate to the previous section? It's linked in the following way...”

Reading like this means you go slower. But it means you're testing yourself as you go along.

Two extensions to try...

1. Try adding **spoken summaries of whole chapters**, verbally once you've read them, like this:

“First, the writers explore....”

“...then they go on to argue that....”

“...then they look at ----- in more detail, explain how....”

“And they finish by concluding that....”

You'll find that the information you read goes in. It sticks, and it's easier to recall. Your reading might have taken a little longer, but you've been able to fully explain what it is you've just read.

2. Try putting together a short lecture as if to an imaginary class.

We often suggest this script if you want to have a go at this one. It looks pretty straightforward, but you'll quickly find you really need to know your topic in order to start your mini-lecture like this.

It's a good one to do in a study group – each member takes responsibility for one topic, and presents it using the script below:

This afternoon I'm going to be talking you through...

This part of the course is crucial because...

The key definitions you'll need to be able to handle are...

The big ideas that you'll need to be confident about are...

The exam is going to ask you to _____, so pay particular attention to _____

Right, we're ready to get started. A good place to begin this lecture is by looking at _____