

Literacy/Comprehension Strategies

Comprehension Strategies

- Accept that you will need to read the text a number of times. Reading it once will not give you what you need.
- First read through:
 - Not trying to get an in-depth understanding.
 - Just trying to identify words or phrases which I don't understand but the text assumes I do.
 - Take each word or phrase one by one and look them up (wikipedia is fantastic for this). You have multiple sources of information, make full use of them.
 - Write the meaning on the text in your own words.

Comprehension Strategies

- Second read through:
 - Still not trying to get an in-depth understanding.
 - Try to identify the major issues being discussed (e.g. How aggregation is achieved in a class). Note you may not understand the discussion of the issue but you need to first identify what is being discussed in a non-ambiguous manner.
 - Make a list of these issues.
- Third read through:
 - Take each item on your list and, one by one attempt to read and understand that section of the text:
 - If there is a sentence or point that you don't understand DO NOT gloss over it and move on. Focus on it until you understand it. This is where you can use myself or the senior tutor because you can seek clarification from us.
 - Try to express the concept or issue in your own words. if you struggle in the attempt then you don't yet have enough understanding.

Comprehension Strategies

- Do Not:
 - Skip over things you don't understand.
 - Do anything else. Turn off your music, television, movie, mobile phone etc. You need to be distraction free.
 - Allow interruptions. Maintaining focus is everything.
- Do:
 - Write down your understanding. That helps later because you can refer to your notes and is also a test of your understanding.
 - Remember that reading text is different to reading a story book. Its not intended to be entertaining and skipping things will make what follows impossible to understand.
 - Be like *“a dog with a bone”*. A never give up, never surrender approach will ALWAYS get you to where you need to be.

Comprehension Strategies

- Keep in mind that the previous technique involves a much higher level of effort than simply browsing through a section of text once.
 - When attempting worksheet exercises/mock tests etc, reflect on how much you feel the knowledge gained from this has helped you.
 - You need to verify that this effort has helped you so that you will be willing to continue in this manner.
 - The more you do this, the wider your knowledge base will become and you will find that many of your units are not anywhere near as difficult as you think they are.
- Seek help from others(fellow students, lecturers, tutors) in developing your skills in this area.

Answering Strategies

- Most students fail questions because:
 - They didn't know the answer and simply vomited out everything they could remember that was vaguely connected to the topic of the question.
 - They misunderstood the question because they didn't comprehend it properly:
 - Test terror.
 - Comprehension issues.
 - Words or phrases not understood.
- The first point is often caused by a lack of confidence. The lack of confidence is often due to the student not being sure about how well they understand what is expected.
- The second two points can be fixed and, coupled with the a better approach to reading texts, will lead to much higher confidence levels. Imagine what it feels like to sit a test or an exam and not feel nervous about it:
 - It is possible! Nobody enjoys doing exams but a well prepared student feels progressively confident as they progress through an exam whereas a poorly prepared student has to fight down a feeling of rising terror and depression.

Answering Strategies

- Analyse the question:
 - Highlight significant terms.
 - Ask the lecturer/invigilator about the meanings of words you don't understand. Either:
 - Understanding the word or phrase in question is part of what you are being tested on in which the response to your query will be “Sorry I cannot answer that”.
 - Understanding the word or phrase in question is NOT part of what you are being tested on in which case you will get an explanation which could be the difference between passing or failing the question. You have NOTHING to lose by asking.
- Make notes about the question:
 - The finer points you want to cover in your answer.
 - A summary of your answer in bullet point form.

Answering Strategies

- Answer the question:
 - Say what you mean and mean what you say:
 - Time is a factor in tests and exams so when you dribble on for three pages you haven't just failed this question, you have cost yourself time that could have been spent answering other questions.
 - May students provide answers which contain factually correct information but which is not part of the answer.
 - Questions that require explanations or justifications are often best answered in bullet point form. The bullet points ensure that you cover everything required in a concise manner and help you keep focussed on your answer and don't stray off into something that is not relevant.

Answering Strategies

- Analyse your answer:
 - Assume you have made some kind of mistake in your answer and go looking for it by proof reading your answer:
 - Have I clearly described what is needed?
 - Have I been ambiguous or left anything out?
 - Have I provided irrelevant information?
 - Correct your answer by addressing anything that has come up from your analysis.

Answering Strategies

- Clarity counts. Neatness is nice but not mandatory (and takes time).
- Use pictures or diagrams if it helps. Often it is easier to draw a diagram and explain it than simply answer with just text.
- Use an example if that helps you explain things better. It is often much easier to explain with an example.
- Make comparisons, either with an example or generically.
- When making corrections don't rewrite the entire question:
 - Cross out the incorrect information.
 - Write the correction somewhere else and
 - Draw an arrow to indicate where your correction fits into your answer.
 - If you are not sure then ask the lecturer/invigilator if your arrows etc. make the answer understandable.

Revision is EVERYTHING

- Students who don't revise continuous assessment simply make the same mistakes in the final exam.
- The purpose of continuous assessment so that you can verify what you know or don't understand.
- Revising doesn't just help you improve your knowledge of the subject:
 - You need to revise your comprehension issues:
 - What did I miss out or misunderstand?
 - Why did I misunderstand or miss out?
 - You need to revise your answering techniques:
 - Was I ambiguous? Why?
 - Did my answer contain anything irrelevant? Why?
 - Was anything missing? Why?

Does all of this actually work?

- Yes! How do you think I made it through my undergrad degree and my PhD?
- I used the answering strategies to prepare this slide presentation!
- Anyone can do this BUT it does take practice.