

ACTIVE READING
BIO 307 and BIO 480/580
Kristy Townsend, Ph.D.
Updated Summer 2016

For any type of reading you do in science courses, try these steps to engage more with the material, remember things better, understand more deeply, and contribute more effectively to class discussions – all in preparation to be tested on the materials (if applicable).

Tips and Tricks:

1. **Have a strategy** for tackling the material – if you are reading a primary research article, maybe you read the Abstract and Intro, then look at Figures first. If it is a commentary or lay article, maybe you read from start-to-finish.
2. **Spend a minute before reading to predict what you will read** (What is the topic and scope?, Who is the audience it was written for?, How familiar are you with this content?)
3. **Underline or highlight** as you read – only the most pertinent sections
4. **Marginalia** – include notes, asterisks, brackets, asides, thoughts, etc.
More ideas here: <http://history.hanover.edu/marginalia.php>
5. **Keep NOTES as you read. They should be:**
 - a. **Summary/Synopsis** – take home messages, key points
 - b. **Critique and analysis** (especially for primary research articles and lay articles)
 - c. **Questions you had as you were reading** – remember to look these up as well!
6. **Have Google open as you read** – look up techniques, terms, ideas that you aren't familiar with as you are reading. Add these as notes or marginalia.
7. **Know when to skim and when to focus**
8. When you're done, **try sketching out an idea map or flow-chart** to summarize the overarching ideas you just read about. This helps cement understanding and enable you to transfer knowledge.
9. **To really emphasize deep learning**, predict potential test questions over the material, and try teaching the material to someone else!