

SKIMMING

Skimming is a technique that is beneficial for students conducting research or engaging with course reading. The goal when skimming is to *search* for the most important ideas of the text. Quickly identify the main arguments or purpose of a source so you can determine if it is relevant to your research. You can also engage more actively with your coursework if you quickly skim a source before diving in for a more thorough reading.

Skimming is a useful technique, but it is not meant to replace a thorough reading of important texts. Instead, use skimming to help determine what is important.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Most books, textbook chapters, or articles published for an academic audience follow the same organization students use in their class papers. You can use this organization to quickly orient yourself with a source.

1. **Title** – Authors use their titles to let their audience know what their work is about. Pay attention to titles and what they tell you about the source’s argument or purpose.
2. **Abstract** – Abstracts are a great place to find a quick overview of a source. Authors use abstracts to summarize their paper’s topic and findings. Please note that not all sources contain abstracts.
3. **Thesis Statement** – Most academic sources contain a thesis statement, or a few sentences that summarize the source’s argument or purpose. In many books, you can find a thesis statement in the preface while articles often contain thesis statements within the introduction.
4. **Introduction** – Authors use introductions to introduce their topic to their readers. Read the introduction or first few paragraphs of a source to understand the author’s topic and direction.
5. **Conclusion** – Authors use conclusions to summarize their main points and usually provide some application like a call for future research. Conclusions can help you identify a source’s arguments or purpose as well as the source’s significance or limitations.
6. **Figures and Graphs** – Pay attention to any figures or graphs since these often contain a lot of distilled information and can help you understand what the source is arguing, researching, or

discussing.

7. **Headings or Chapter Titles** – Headings or chapter titles can tell you about the topics covered in a source and how the source’s argument or purpose progresses from one point to the next.
8. **Topic Sentences and Concluding Sentences** – Topic sentences (the first sentence or two of each paragraph) and concluding sentences (the last sentence or two of each paragraph) often contain the most important points or information in a paragraph. You can use topic and concluding sentences to get a broad outline of a source.
 - a. Topic sentences are like “mini introductions” for each paragraph and provide a broad statement about the main point of each paragraph.
 - b. Similarly, concluding sentences often summarize the paragraph and sometimes tie the paragraph back to the thesis statement.

PUT SKIMMING INTO PRACTICE

If you are conducting research – You can use these tips to quickly sort through material. Use skimming to:

- Identify sources irrelevant to your research and discard them.
- Draw the main points from more relevant sources.
- Set aside a few of the most relevant sources to read more closely.

If you are working through your course reading – Skimming can help you quickly identify the main arguments or purpose of the source. Use skimming to:

- Engage more actively with the text by asking how well the supporting evidence or points contribute to the main arguments or purpose.
- Highlight judiciously since you know the main arguments or purpose.
- Identify what sections are most relevant to your coursework or will require the most study and direct your time accordingly.
- Review a source you have already read thoroughly to refresh your memory before an exam.

TECHNIQUES TO HELP GUIDE YOUR EYES

When you skim, you can use your hand or cursor to guide your eyes to move quickly and intentionally.

- The two videos linked below showcase how to read the topic sentence of a paragraph, skim the body, and read the conclusion sentence of a paragraph. As you follow your hand or mouse, search for keywords relating to the topic that stand out to you.
 - The S Method: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/TyecrjdMLuU>
 - The Line Method: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/VH-liCvGgVg>

PRACTICE NOW