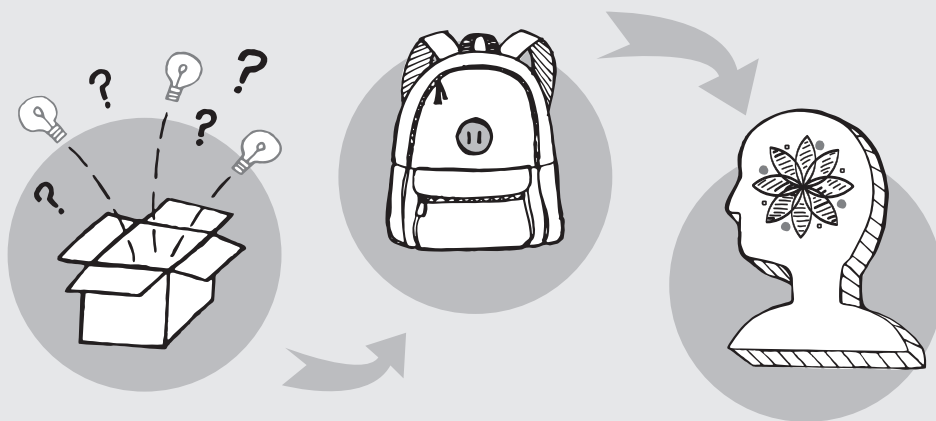


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SAGE Publications Ltd  
1 Oliver's Yard  
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## ACADEMIC

### READING: HOW TO READ AND WHY BOTHER

This section will consider ‘reading’. (It is in inverted commas because there is a vast array of interesting other forms of gaining knowledge these days, e.g. podcasts – see Chapter 6 which offers more ideas.) It will also explore why reading is an integral part of any learning experience. It will look at different forms of reading and consider critical literacy skills such as which sources are suitable and which should be considered with a ‘pinch of salt’. Not all online platforms are equal.

On a teacher training course you will be expected to supplement your time in sessions with additional reading, and your course will often have a number of recommended texts. It is quite common for students to overlook these reading lists, but they really should act as a starting point for all students. You will be expected to read books and journal articles, although increasingly lecturers are recommending videos and podcasts as supplementary forms of literature. Before we start to look at the different types of reading and how each of these might be useful, it is worth stopping to consider what the main differences are between these different types of publications. Journal articles will be more ‘current’ as it takes less time to publish an article than the average two years it takes to have a book published. However, you will tend to find that journal articles can be quite ‘niche’: sometimes considering small sample sizes and particular research questions, which may or may not be relevant to your particular situation in

school. Finally, Internet websites, videos and podcasts need to be critically appraised for their value. You should always bear in mind that journal articles have to be peer reviewed to be published, and books have to go through several editorial checks, but the Internet allows the self-publication of materials. Don't throw the baby out with the bath water and disregard everything you read online. Instead, if something catches your eye, see if you can search for the same ideas using journal articles or books and then follow the research thread from there.

Let us now look at what could be considered to be the five main types of reading: Google booking, skimming, scanning, intensive and extensive. Each can be of use to the busy trainee teacher.

## GOOGLE BOOKING

Google Books has revolutionised how essays are now written. Once upon a time, tired students had to make the long journey to a physical library. There they would look through the Dewey Decimal System for the books they would need, or trudge over to the stacks (large metal containers with journals in them) and sift through the editions. However, while looking for their actual items a student might stumble across another text or see another journal article, which looked interesting, pick this up and become informed about a topic they had no previous knowledge of. Alas, Google Books means some students are now less informed than previously. This is because instead of a student reading widely and then writing an essay from the ideas which they have read, said student can write an essay out of ideas which are already in their head, then go to Google Books to google a reference to 'add in' to 'back up' a point. This means that key ideas can often be missed, the level of criticality of the essay is shallow and the student really has not learned as much as they could have done while writing the essay. This is not to suggest that you should boycott Google Books, just that there are different ways in which you could consider using it instead. By making an informed choice to use Google Books as the first in a series of actions (e.g. combined with some of the approaches below), rather than last in the writing process, you'll find that not only are your essays better but you are more informed.

## SKIMMING

Skimming is simply casting your eye over an article or text, looking for key terms or phrases to enable deeper reading later. If you have access to an online version of the article, the 'find' function can be of particular use.

You can input the key terms/phrases and the ‘find’ function will skim the whole article for you. However, you should be careful with this method as it is only as good as your search terms. Therefore it can be useful to search for the same idea with a variety of different search terms and try to be aware of where the article/book was written; for example, ‘Early Years Foundation Stage’ (EYFS) may be referred to as ‘Kindergarten’, or ‘primary school’ as ‘elementary school’.

## SCANNING

Scanning on the other hand is allowing your eyes to track across the page or sentence, aiming for a basic understanding, but not a deep interrogation. It may be that you use skimming to locate possible sections, and then scanning to confirm that these are the ‘important’ sections, and thus you highlight these sections to come back to when ready. Do be aware that while having an e-copy is useful for skimming, it can actually be more difficult to scan read from a computer screen. It can be useful when you are scanning reading to populate tables with the basic information of each chapter or article. This means that when you come back to access these in future for intensive reading you can access the table and quickly see what is relevant. A suggested format is shown in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1** Template for scanning reading

Article name	Date published	Research aims	Sample size	Limitations

If you do decide to use the example shown in Table 2.1, this can be a good mechanism for sharing journal articles between you and your peers because not all journals will be relevant to you. If you all share two or three journals between yourselves you can collectively work your way through the key texts in that particular area quite quickly. As with all group work, this approach is only as good as your ‘weakest’ member, but the fact that you all stand to gain from this approach can be quite motivational for all students.

## INTENSIVE

Intensive reading requires time and space to be able to interrogate the text that you are reading. It is most likely that intensive reading will be reading on the same topic or perhaps by the same author and, in this way, it lacks the depth and breadth which extensive reading can offer. However, what it does provide is a narrow lens focus that can be a useful view for 'getting to grips with a topic'. It can be very helpful to adopt self-questioning strategies, considering what you have read and what it means at the end of each section. This will hopefully prevent you from reading an entire chapter or article and wondering what you have just read. It can be useful when reading to have a packet of post-it notes with you while you are reading and to try to summarise the key ideas or conclusion on to these post-it notes. You may find as you continue reading that you might want to rephrase or readjust some of the terms that you have used initially in light of new readings. However, it is hoped that eventually, after completing your reading, you start to see the same ideas/conclusions emerging and you do not need to write any more post-it notes. This means that you now know it is time to stop reading and start writing.

## EXTENSIVE

As intensive reading is a narrow lens focus, extensive reading is the wider lens. This type of reading is prolonged and helps you to understand how the ideas that you might have read about in your more focused intensive reading are connected to each other and to other topics. This type of reading can be useful in helping you to become a professional teacher as your ideas do not exist in silos but rather they are synergetic. To achieve extensive reading it is important that there is an element of enjoyment from the reading, which will sustain the reading process over time. It is very much hoped that this text helps to develop your extensive reading.