

# Strategic Support of **ACTIVE READING IN ADULTS**

# Understanding Reading Challenges

A learner must be actively engaged with reading to understand and retain the information, this can be a particular challenge for learners who have a history of reading difficulties and/or for whom reading is still an effortful activity. A useful element of study skills practice with such learners is to carry out an Active Reading Audit with the learner to encourage them to think metacognitively about factors impacting on their reading skills. Such practice will aid the study skills support tutor to:

- Develop appropriate active reading strategies to meet the personal requirements of the learner in working towards gaining a clearer understanding of the text they are reading.
- Develop ways to actively engage the reader with what they are reading, using for example visual, imagination and linking techniques to make the text more meaningful for them.

# Focused reading

- It is likely that reading long texts will be more challenging for learners; it is, therefore, important to consider methods of focusing the reading to what is essential.
- Individuals with reading difficulties may feel that they have to overread or read for extensive periods to ensure they are gaining the required level of understanding; this can be likened to having a type of safety net around their study skills practice as they lack confidence in their reading abilities. These types of concerns need to be unpacked as part of the initial discussions about their reading strategies.
- Delaying tactics (conscious or sub-conscious) can be adapted. For example, spending a lot of time selecting reading materials in an unfocused way, in order to put off doing the actual reading required.



# ‘Warm-up’ for Reading

To work towards more focused reading, it is useful to encourage readers to think about preparing for reading in the same way as they might prepare or warm-up for, say, a gym session or tennis match. Preparation should include:

- Being selective about what materials/texts are chosen.
- Establishing pre-reading questions.
- Where possible, identifying with lecturers/teachers/employers the key texts or sections that require reading, as a reasonable adjustment.

# Being selective about what is read

- It is useful practice to encourage learners to realise that they do not have to read everything within, say, a book, report or journal article.
- It is the role of the tutor/trainer to help the learner to see that it is possible to be selective and identify key elements from, say, the journal abstract, introduction and conclusion in deciding whether they need to read in more depth. This will require skimming and scanning the texts before reading for full understanding, which the learner may well require help with. Similarly, it may be possible to identify whether a book requires further depth of reading by looking at the contents, final index and introductory chapters / sections.
- Whilst this may sound obvious, it is amazing how many students will report that they are not aware of these strategies, particularly when they experience such fear of reading in general.

# Establishing Pre-reading questions

It is really important to establish some questions before starting to read a book, report, journal article, etc. and to have these typed up for ease of reference. The sorts of questions to encourage learners to ask are:

- Why am I reading this text? What is my purpose? What do I want as outcomes?
- What specific information do I need to focus on my essay question / prepare for a presentation?
- What are the key arguments that the author is trying to make?
- Are the sources / arguments / research studies, etc. reliable and valid?
- What are the pointers for further reading?
- What other questions might be usefully included?



# Accessible Reading Materials

It is helpful to encourage strategies to make the text more accessible and, therefore, easier to comprehend and remember. Here are a few suggestions:

- Break large amounts of text down into small manageable chunks, using colour, large clear fonts, bullet points, highlighters, colour coding, etc.
- Wherever possible use or seek out 'plain English' versions of materials to reduce unnecessary reading caused by unclear and needlessly complicated text.
- Provide instructions/key points in visual format e.g. mind maps, flow-charts.
- If applicable to the learner: produce materials on coloured paper (according to the learner's preference); explore the use of coloured overlays and changing screen background colour and fonts according to the learner's preference.
- Suggest that the learner verbalises the reading material.
- Encourage use of assistive technology, such as text-to-speech software.

# Assistive Technology

The use of assistive technology devices and programs can support learners to read and review their own written text more easily/comfortably, for example:

- Text-to-speech software helps with reading and understanding through listening to the text
- Scanner pens
- Explore accessible text options in Adobe Acrobat/PDF files
- Download sound files of reading material to mobile devices, MP3 players, etc. to listen to
- Computer screen-colour filter and ruler



# Visual Disturbance and Visual Stress

- Some learners may encounter visual disturbances when reading. This may present as: headaches; eye strain; tiredness; print blurring, moving, halo effect, rivering of white space, all of which impeded speed of reading, quality of reading (what can be drawn from the text and higher-order reading development).
- Study skills practice can include discussion with the learner to identify if they have any visual disturbances and what can be done to help. For example, ways to reduce distortion effect can include consideration of personal preferences for:
  - font size and style (sans serif fonts e.g. Arial, Calibri, Comic Sans etc.)
  - coloured paper to reduce glare; change screen colour background
  - coloured overlays
  - ambient lighting - type and intensity of light in the space where reading is being done

NB: If learners report visual disturbance, it is good practice to recommend that they seek further professional advice even if some of the modifications you suggest do ease matters. This helps ensure that the person has full and appropriate professional advice.