Strategies for Reading Difficult Texts

- **Do not read too much in one sitting** – break up long texts into manageable sections
- **Scan the section**
  - Pay attention to titles, headings, sub-headings, and topic sentences
  - Pay attention to graphs, charts, and diagrams
  - Check the beginning and the end for leading questions and exercises
  - Read the summary at the end of the chapter
- **Read first for what you do understand**
  - Mark what you do not understand to review later
- **Take notes as you read**
  - Write questions and comments in the margin, especially next to confusing passages
  - Highlight important points, terms, and concepts
  - Highlight connections among ideas
- **As you read, practice the "look-away method:"**
  - Periodically look away from the text and ask yourself a question relating to the text
  - Phrase the question positively!
  - Write it down in the margin or in a notebook.
  - Answer it in your own words and write the answer down.
- **Look up words that you don’t understand**
  - Make a list in a notebook
  - Highlight them in the book
- **Read to the end**
  - Do not get discouraged and stop reading.
  - The general idea of a reading can become clearer as you get closer to the end.
- **Organize your notes after you finish reading**
  - Create an organized list of questions and answers
  - Create an organized list of words and definitions
  - Create a “map” or “spider-web” of ideas and concepts
  - Pay attention to relationships between ideas.
- **Do not limit your notes to words!**
  - Use representations, graphics, pictures, colors, and arrows to visualize and connect ideas. Use whatever techniques work to help you understand.
- **If you do not understand your reading, do not panic!**
  - Set it aside for the next day. This allows you to process the material, even while you sleep.
  - Re-read the text with your notes in mind.
- **Separate out what you do understand from what you do not.**
  - Focus on re-reading what you did not understand the first (or even second) time.
- **If the reading is still a challenge, consult with your teacher, classmates, or a Writing Center tutor.**