

Reading Websites

by Johanna Schomaker

When browsing through websites and looking up pieces of information, you are often confronted with a lot of information at the same time. Have you ever wondered what a good way to read websites would be? Then this guide might be for you:

- This guide leads you through a **variety of steps** of reading, understanding, and evaluating websites (with pre-, while-, and post-reading suggestions).
- It briefly explains some reading **strategies** (skimming and scanning) as well as using graphic organizers that help you extract and structure information you find on websites.



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Pre-Reading¹

Reading goal

Before beginning to read, it is important to know why you read a text. Answer the question:

- ***What are you looking for in this text?*** (Maybe you are researching a topic: “I am looking for information about Christmas traditions in England.” Or maybe you want to find out more about the text itself: “I am looking for the main argument of this text.”)

Overview

In the next step, you prepare by looking at every information you can get about the text **without** reading it completely:

- ***What do the title and headlines tell you about the content of the text?***
- ***Are there text features that tell you something about the text?*** (A date and an author’s name under the title might indicate that the text is an article. Emphasized words or sections can give you information, too.)
- ***What genre of text are you expecting?***
- ***Is there a short opening paragraph that tells you about the content of the text?***
- ***What pictures are there?***

Questions and predictions

Read the first line of every paragraph. With the information, try to predict the content of the text and ask questions that you can answer later.

¹ Cf. Henseler, Roswitha & Carola Surkamp (2009): “O this reading, what a thing it is! Lesekompetenz in der Fremdsprache Englisch fördern.”, *Der Fremdsprachliche Unterricht Englisch* 43: p. 9; cf. Coppens, Katie (2019): “Strategies to improve nonfiction reading”, *Science Scope* 43(1): pp. 18f. All rights reserved.

While-Reading

Scanning and Skimming

If you want to get as much information out of a text as quickly as possible, it is helpful to use reading strategies like **skimming** or **scanning**.



Scanning

A scanner you may know from shopping for groceries. A scanner quickly looks over information and checks for (“scans”) the important parts. When we use scanning as a reading strategy, we quickly move with our eyes over the text and search for specific information without reading every word.



Skimming

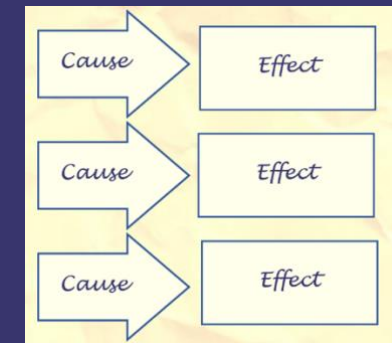
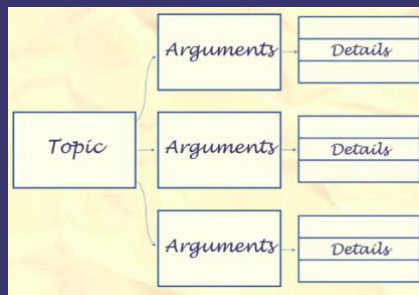
Skimming is a process where cream is collected from the top of the milk. When we use skimming as a reading strategy, it works similar to scanning. Here we do not just look out for specific information, but we try to learn what the whole text is about, as quickly as possible. Again, we do not read every word, but we try to move our eyes through the text and take in what we can.



Graphic Organizers

Creating graphic organizers of a text is a good way to gain an overview and reflect on the structure of your text.

You can decide for yourself, what your organizer will look like; below you find some popular examples that you could try out:



Tipps

Hyperlinks

A hyperlink is an electronic link providing direct access from one distinctly marked place in a hypertext or hypermedia document to another in the same or a different document (Merriam Webster). Hyperlinks can be used to move through the document. Click the hyperlink with the right mouse-button to open it in a new tab. This way you do not lose your current position in the text.

Search function

If you are looking for a special word in a document, you do not have to read everything yourself. Hold [Strg] on your keyboard– then press the letter [F]. This will open a search bar where you can search for a word or phrase.

Taken from: Merriam Webster. "Hyperlink." <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hyperlink>. Last accessed: 22 September 2022. All rights reserved.

Post-Reading – The Process of Evaluation²

Below you find some aspects and guiding questions that you should ask yourself after having read a website.

Representation

- *How does the website try to convince its readers?*
- *How does it try to establish authenticity and authority?*
- *What different opinions are offered about a topic?*
- *Does the source seem reliable, accurate or biased?*
- *How does it present the whole discussion and both its sides? Are there implicit values or ideologies present?*

Language

- *How is the website designed and how does that affect the reader? (For example, the use of **graphic design** to appeal to children.)*
- *Which parts of the website are hypertextual? What can you click on, to move somewhere else? How does that affect the reader?*
- *How are the users addressed? Why are they addressed like that?*
- *How much control does the user have about the things he is offered or what data he is sharing?*

Production

- *Who can add information to the website and in what form (articles, posts, comments...)? What kind of audience is given to them and what advantages or problems can that cause? What technologies are used to promote the content of certain authors? Is someone promoted more than others? Which advantages or problems could that cause?*
- *How are advertisements handled on the website? Are they easy to identify? Are they distracting from the information?*

Audience

- *How are users asked to participate? (Web polls, bulletin boards, 'user generated content')?*
- *How does the website collect information about visitors?*
- *How do different groups of people use the website and for what purpose?*
- *How could different groups of people interpret the website?*
- *Could there be a threat to get addicted to the website? Does the website take measures to prevent it? (For example, a restricted number of posts in contrast to an unlimited number of posts.)*

This process will get easier, the more websites you read. The better you know the topic, the easier it gets to spot unreliable data.



² cf. Buckingham, David (2015): "Defining digital literacy: What do young people need to know about digital media?", *Nordic Journal of Digital Literacy* 4: p. 27. All rights reserved.