

The box below lists common problems you may encounter with difficult reading assignments as well as actions you can take to address each problem.

Problems	Actions to take
Poor concentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take 5-minute breaks every hour. • Read difficult material when your mind is fresh and alert. • Choose a location to study where you can focus without frequent distractions. • Focus your attention in whatever way best works for you—i.e. turn off cell phone, computer, music, etc.
Words are difficult or unfamiliar.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use context and analyze word parts. • Skim through material before reading. Mark and look up meanings of difficult words. Write down the meanings of those words in the margin. • Refer to the vocabulary list, footnotes, or glossary in your textbook.
Sentences are long or confusing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read out loud to yourself. • Locate the key idea(s). • Identify if the sentence is confusing because there are words you do not understand, and look up definitions of words if necessary. • Rewrite sentences in your own words so long as you do not change the meaning.
Ideas are hard to understand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rephrase content in your own words. • Take notes. • Study with a classmate; discuss difficult ideas. • Look for supplemental texts that may explain the ideas in a way that makes more sense to you.
Ideas are new or unfamiliar; you have little or no knowledge about the topic, and the writer assumes otherwise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you did not skip introductory information. • Get background information by referring to an earlier section or chapter in the book, an encyclopedia, or a more basic text.
The material seems poorly organized.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay more attention to headings. • Read the summary, if available. • Try to discover organization by writing an outline or drawing a map as you read.
You do not know what is and is not important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preview. • Ask and answer guide questions. • Locate and underline topic sentences.