Attitude
This may seem like an obvious statement, but many students dread reading (and studying) because they have never found it to be "fun." Students may logically argue: "If reading (or studying) wasn't fun yesterday, chances are it won't be fun today." To this, the English teacher must confess, "You're right! It may not be fun." So, the first step is to get rid of old expectations you have about reading (and studying) that you probably got from your fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Butalinski (she was the one who told you that liver tasted good if you ate enough of it).

Reading (and studying), like most things, is "fun" maybe fifty percent of the time. The other fifty percent of the time it can be dry, difficult, and draining…for you…for English teachers…and even for Mrs. Butalinski. Keep in mind, reading Sports Illustrated will require a different attitude than reading a chemistry text or a political science journal. So, if you alter your expectations and change your attitude according to the reading material, reading won't be such a tremendous let-down.

Academic reading (and studying) is usually hard work, if you are doing it right. Once we accept this, reading (and studying) becomes less painful, less disappointing, more interesting, more useful (notice the author didn't write "more fun"). Reading (or studying) takes effort: you have to be alert and force your eyes across a page, back and forth, back and forth, hundreds of times. It is tiring. It is brain-draining. It is tough on the eyes and neck. It requires concentration, recall, and synthesis. You can't zone out to the point that all of the sudden you find yourself drooling over the cookies you have been thinking of for the past two pages. And the reason you tend to fade away to those tropic beaches every time you open a book may be because you have not convinced yourself of one basic reading (and studying) principle: Most reading (and studying) takes concentration and effort, like it or not.

So what is the point of this little bubble-burst lecture? When you change your orientation from "reading (and studying) is fun" to "reading (and studying) is work," things become easier, paradoxically. The reader (student) who has shifted her attitude now says, before she begins each assignment: "This is work. I can't be passive. The words aren't going to jump off the page and into my head. I've got to consciously engage the text (or notes or assignment) to find meaning on each page." In this light, reading (and studying) becomes a challenge, a challenge that the student can face and conquer.

Environment
With this proper attitude in place, now the student is prepared to change her reading (and studying) habits. No longer can she lounge on the couch, feet up, stereo playing, and door wide open, letting in all of the commotion of the hall. This sort of approach kills comprehension and recall. The serious reader now knows the truth that B.F. Skinner discovered in his psychological studies: People are, to a greater or lesser degree, a product of their environment. Therefore, a student has to be smart enough to realize that if she wants to improve her reading (and studying) skills, the solution is simple: Improve the environment. No longer can she simultaneously listen to alternative rock (or whatever) music and read a book (or study). She has to be willing to change her ways, ways which seem "natural," but are actually detrimental.

Here are a few simple guidelines to improve your reading (and studying) milieu:
1. Sit in a chair that allows you an upright posture, with a desk or table in front of you. You may want to prop the book at an angle with another book underneath. (The goal is efficiency, not sleep-inducing comfort.)
2. Make sure there is plenty of light illuminating the pages of the book so your eyes don't strain. (The more eye strain, the less brain energy, and less recall.)
3. Be sure the room is quiet. Maybe you are the type that goes nuts with total silence, but try it. If it is maddening, then try the low hum of a fan or the soft music from an instrumental CD. (Lyrics distract you from concentration.)

4. Reading (and studying) in this sort of modified environment might seem strange at first, but don't let this prevent you from getting used to it. You may be surprised how much it helps.

**Approach**

With the environment set, now it's time to try some new reading (and studying) techniques. Like your habits concerning your reading (and studying) environment, your habits in the reading (and studying) process itself may need improvement. With the attitude that "reading (and studying) is work" firmly established in your mind, actively try these techniques next time you read:

1. Don't read (or study) when you are tired. If you do, you will only set yourself up for failure.
2. Before you begin reading (and studying), tell yourself the following: "I will not zone out, but if by chance I do, I will not allow myself to go back to where I began zoning out to reread the passage again." Why not? Going back over material again and again wastes time, and even worse, encourages a bad habit. Exercise discipline over your mind--be the master--don't let yourself go back. If you feel you must, review the material again after you have finished all the pages.
3. Just as you discipline yourself for work, discipline yourself for breaks. For every hour of reading (and studying), give yourself ten minutes of break time (no more!). This will motivate you to work hard so you can play hard later.
4. Read with a pen or pencil (unless the book is not yours to mark, i.e. the library's). Note the names of characters (or technical information and processes). Mark the margin when an important action takes place. Pay attention to setting and any significant elements. Underline key words you don't know and look them up later. However, mark selectively, otherwise your marks will be so prevalent that they will defeat the purpose of helping you to remember. You judge what seems important. When you mark in this manner, you make reading (and studying) a more "active" endeavor, and this improves recall and prevents sleep. *Take notes in the margin to help you make sense of what you have just read and improve recall. If the margin is too small to take meaningful notes, have a pencil and paper nearby.*
5. If you feel you read too slowly, run your finger or a pencil under each line at a pace that is a little faster than what your eyes are used to traveling. This may seem strange at first, but it is one of the best ways to increase speed and recall. Stay with the pace of your finger or pencil, even if you don't get the meaning of every word.
6. Eventually your eyes will become trained to go at a faster speed. (Remember: Don't go back! If you really feel you are missing vital information, then go back over the material at the end of a chapter, not before.)
7. If you are one of those who whispers each word as you read--STOP! This practice slows you down. Button the lips and let the brain do the work. Conserve energy.

**The Final Result**

After retraining yourself in all three areas--attitude, environment, and approach--you will improve your reading (and studying) skills over time. Just be patient with yourself as you try these new approaches. Gradually your critical thinking\(^1\) skills will develop alongside your reading (and studying) skills. Your brain will function at a higher cognitive\(^2\) level. This is exciting! Finally, let the procedure itself become the goal; turn it into a game of sorts. In this way, reading (and studying) might become (dare I mention the word?) fun, but in ways that you never could have imagined before.

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\(^1\)Critical Thinking means “Focused, organized thinking about such things as the logical relationships among ideas, the soundness of evidence, and the differences between fact and opinion.”

http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/007256296x/student_view0/glossary.html

\(^2\)Cognitive means “Awareness with perception, reasoning and judgment, intuition, and memory; The mental process by which knowledge is acquired.” www.finr.com/glossary.html