

Using your reading

Building your argument as you go

Some people prefer to do all their reading first and then to plan what they want to say and write it up.

Other people feel swamped if they take that approach: either the reading never seems to end or they have so much information that they don't know what to do with it. If that sounds like you, maybe an approach like this will help:



Working hypothesis approach

Here, you target your reading, building your argument and gathering evidence as you read:

1. Get an overview: read something general; review previous notes etc.
 - Be alert for important aspects/ issues/ themes and so on
2. Write a basic answer to your question/s in no more than 2-3 sentences:
 - **It doesn't matter whether this answer is right or not: you will change and develop it as you read.**
3. Make a list of things you will have to find out in order to test whether or not your 'hypothesis' answer is a good one, for example:
 - What evidence can I find in support of/ against this position?
 - What theoretical perspectives does it fit/ not fit with?
 - What do major figures in this field have to say?

(Make these questions more and more specific as you read more)
4. Look for material that will answer your questions and start to read:
 - **Critically evaluate the texts themselves**
 - **Compare them to other texts you have read**
 - **Relate them to your research question/s**
 - **Use them to modify your hypothesis answer/s**



Modify and develop your hypothesis answer as you read:

How far – if at all – does each text confirm your answer?

Which parts? In what way? Can you use it in your dissertation? How? Where?

How far – if at all – does it contradict your answer?

- Do you need to modify your answer? Why? In what way?
- Will you keep your answer the same? How will you deal with this text in your argument?

Does it suggest new questions/ issues you need to address?

- How will you build these into your argument?

This interaction between your reading and your thinking lets you develop the steps of your argument as you go, identifying the points you want to make, the evidence you will use, the work you want to critique and so on.