Reading at Work

Just because you can drive a car doesn't mean you can drive a tractor or an 18-wheeler truck. Sure, all involve turning a steering wheel and applying the gas and breaks, but they require different kinds of driving.

The same is true for reading. When you first learned how to read, teachers focused on getting you to enjoy the process. As you grew older, reading became important for studying. At work, people read for many reasons:

- Instructions to complete a process or perform a task properly
- Equipment warnings to remain safe
- Email to respond to others or follow up on requests
- Reports to learn the status of a process or activity
- Other reasons

Workplace reading is not meant for fun, although it is good when you enjoy reading job-related material. Much work reading can be technical--full of numbers and complex, industry-specific words. Sometimes work reading is hard to understand and remember. These five steps will help you be a better reader at work.

Step 1: Read the title, subject line, or opening line of a document for clues to the content. These give you the big picture. For example, if you receive an email and attachment with the subject line "Agenda for the January 4 meeting," you know that the attachment discusses the topics to be covered at the meeting.

Step 2: Read headings and subheadings. To get a quick view of a long document and learn more about its content, read the headings and subheadings first. They provide an outline of the document.

Step 3: Scan the paragraph information. To help you identify the information you might need from a document, scan the main idea of each paragraph--what the paragraph is about. Then scan the rest of the paragraph. Underline the important words and sentences.

Step 4. Recite to remember. Forgetting what we read happens to all of us, but you can help yourself remember by looking up from your document. Think over what you just read and recite any part that will be hard to remember.

Step 5: Interpret new words. You must know what unfamiliar words mean before you can understand what you read. Use a dictionary or thesaurus to help you know the meaning of words.

Action: Scan the following paragraph and identify why businesses started giving coffee breaks.

Coffee Break
Managers have known for a long time that productivity of employees stays high for about two hours in the morning and then falls off until about lunch time. Efficiency usually goes back up after lunch. Experts who studied this situation found that a short break in the morning would increase productivity, just as lunch did. The break became known as "coffee break" because many people drank coffee during this time.