



Hi graduate friends,

I'm sure you can think of instances when you read something and didn't understand it. Many students panic, reread it 10 times, or start a long journey of Googling. Knowing that you're new to the topic doesn't help as you may feel the pressure to catch up with the level you think others are at (but are they really?!).



Research shows that more experienced readers (e.g., lecturers) also don't understand what they're reading quite often. But they just don't freak out as much as a newer reader might! According to Weller (2010), they have learned to accept gaps in their knowledge and tolerate uncertainties and ambiguities more, knowing that understanding something is a long process and one piece of text is simply a vague starting point. This is while some students *fetishize* texts, and the pressure of understanding becomes too much.

So, get comfortable with uncertainty. When you don't understand something, mark it and move on. It's possible that a few sentences or paragraphs later (or even 4 articles later), you'll finally understand some or enough of it. Let's look at this introductory paragraph in an article on a history of gender, power and imprisonment (Bosworth, 2000) with reflections included in parentheses:

► History has long informed criminological understanding and analysis of imprisonment. Scholars have both challenged and explained contemporary penal sanctions by looking at the past. (I sort of understood this but it's only the beginning so I feel safe to move on!) However, the history of the prison has typically been characterized by an unacknowledged chronological and gender bias: (I didn't get this, but I can move on because it ends in a colon and that tells me the next sentence will explain it more.) first, criminologists have prioritized a particular historical period in their discussion of the 'birth of the prison'; second, women have been noticeably absent from most studies on incarceration. (I understood this.) In contrast to such accounts, this article will demonstrate that early modern women's imprisonment had much in common with later penalty suggesting not only an alternative chronology, but also the centrality of women's experiences. (I didn't understand this sentence either, but I can move on because based on the first part of the sentence, I realize that it's something in contrast to the previous sentence that I did understand! It also says "this article will demonstrate..." and this tells me this is what the rest of the article is going to be about, so I have more chances to understand it.) ◀

Note that I almost didn't understand half of the paragraph but I'm still able to move on. When you reach the end of the article and you still haven't understood some things, take a moment to reflect, do you even have to understand it? What is the goal of your reading? If it's needed for your goal, do some more digging or revisit it later. If it's not related to your goal, then perhaps it's ok to just not understand it.

Best,



Najmeh Keyhani (she/her/hers), PhD, from your [Learning Development & Success](#) team!

**Reference:**

Bosworth, M. (2000). Confining femininity: A history of gender, power and imprisonment. *Theoretical criminology*, 4(3), 265-284.

Weller, S. (2010). Comparing lecturer and student accounts of reading in the humanities. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 9(1), 87-106.

---

GRADUpdATE is a monthly e-newsletter dedicated to helping students succeed in graduate school. This information is provided by Learning Development & Success. To unsubscribe/subscribe, e-mail [gradupdate-request@uwo.ca](mailto:gradupdate-request@uwo.ca), type 'unsubscribe' or 'subscribe' as the subject & click send. To view previous newsletters, visit the [GRADUpdATE Archive](#).