...introduction, conclusion and especially articles' abstract are very handy to approach a given reading...

...if I really struggle to get into one of these texts, I try and make sense of the introduction and the conclusion and work out what the key concept is. Then I scan through the article looking for something that interests me and read that section first. Sooner or later I’ve read the whole thing, although not necessarily in the order it is intended - I’ll try and make sense of the structure of the argument at the end...

...I find, though, that if I don't get something in the readings, I can pick up the main ideas through the more accessible writing on the discussion board...

...I try to understand what I can and get a general gist of a text, but I don't worry too much about individual sections which don't make sense to me...

...if I'm struggling and a line-by-line approach isn't working because of wandering attention, I'll skim through to see if there is something that grabs me...

...read the examples first...

...I read one paragraph, stop, try to say out loud what I think it is, re-skim it, then move on to the next. Sometimes I have to "say" it out loud to whatever poor soul is in the room with me and try to explain to them what I think it means. It's a very very painful process. But by the end of it I can usually understand the paper pretty well and I have a very clear idea of where the argument doesn't quite gel...

...try to summarise the article in one or two sentences...

...write a sentence summarising each paragraph, and then re-read them to see if I can make a summary in my own words...

...go to a book review...

...check out whose cited the paper and surf around their work to see how and when they are citing it...

...check out a later work by the same author, in which they often quickly sum up the idea at the core of the paper...

...Google it and see how are people are trying to construct ideas around the paper (though this can sometimes lead to more confusion)...

...look for forum discussions on it...

...I try to discuss it with someone else. This can be someone who has also read the reading, someone who is aware of the issue, or even on occasion someone who doesn't know anything about it at all but is a willing listener!!