**Textbook Strategies**

## Make the Most of Your College Textbook

Reading a college textbook takes skill. It is not enough to simply read the text; you must interact with it in order to learn the information. Reading textbooks is such hard work because they contain many abstract concepts in word-dense pages that make up very long chapters. Skimming or passive reading is not an option when reading a textbook. You must prepare for the reading by previewing the chapter and dividing the chapter into sections of reasonable length. As you are reading, you should use some type of reading/study system to help you engage the material. In addition, monitoring your comprehension is key to ensuring that you are understanding and learning the material. Finally, after you are finished with a section of reading, you must review the material to ensure that it made it into long-term memory.

### Preview the Chapter before You Read

Spending two to five minutes previewing a chapter will actually save time while reading and increase your comprehension. Read the section title, the introduction, headings, and the summary. In addition, look at all charts, diagrams, and pictures. Do not forget to read the captions.

### Read the Chapter Prior to Lecture

Reading the chapter before your instructor lectures on the material helps you build a base of knowledge. Humans learn by scaffolding (or building) on the knowledge that they already have learned. Thus, you will learn more from the lecture if you have that base of knowledge gained from the textbook.

### Divide the Chapter into Readable Chunks

Reading a fifty-page chapter in one sitting is not a good idea. By breaking that fifty-page chapter into five chunks of ten pages each, you will increase your comprehension and understanding of the material. In addition, it will also decrease the amount of time that you spend reading the chapter because it is easier to stay on task and focused.

### Use a Reading/Study System

Effective study systems include P2R, SQ3R, and RUN-R. These reading/study systems help you to engage the text so that you do not slip into passive reading.

These reading/study systems are outlined in further detail later in this handout.

### Monitor your Comprehension

At the end of each paragraph or page, pause and check your comprehension of the material. Ask yourself if you understand everything that you just read. Think about how the information relates to what you already know (your prior knowledge base). If you do not understand something, revisit that section again.

### Prompt your Memory

Use the headings of your textbook to prompt your memory. Read the heading and then recite out loud everything that you remember about that topic. Another useful tool is to write questions about the material in the margins of the textbook. As you are reviewing, answer these questions. If you are unsure of the answer, read the respective section of the text again.

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Increase your level of interaction with reading assignments

College courses require a lot of reading. So much information must be taught and learned during the course of one semester that there usually is no way for the instructor to cover everything during class lectures. Thus, students must show responsibility for their own learning by completing supplemental reading assignments. However, it is easy to slip into a completion state of mind when approaching these assignments - you speed through the reading as quickly as possible so you can say that you completed it. If this is the means by which you approach reading, your knowledge and understanding of the material will not be enhanced by the assignment.

The Reading Hierarchy

Look at the hierarchy below. Which portion describes your current level of interaction with reading assignments? Note how many levels are above where you currently stand and how much more you could be doing to obtain the maximum benefit from reading assignments. Reference the handouts on the specific strategies that you need to utilize in order to move up the hierarchy.

I just read the assignment
I read and highlight the important information
I read, highlight, and take notes
I read, highlight, take notes, and predict test questions
I read, highlight, take notes, predict test questions, and do some activities.
I read, highlight, take notes, predict test questions, and do some activities.
Textbook Strategies

Reading Systems

A reading system provides just what the name implies – a systematic method for reading and understanding the text. Utilizing a reading system provides a way for you to actively engage your text and helps you to remember what you read.

After you learn about each of the three systems outlined below, try them out to see which one works the best for you. Keep in mind that you also may want to use different systems for different classes.

The important thing to remember when determining which system to use is to match the reading system to the level of difficulty of the text.

Also, do not become discouraged by the amount of work that these systems require. Although you may have to put in extra time when reading your text, using these methods will cut down on the subsequent amount of time that you will need to review the text before an exam.

SQ3R

Textbook Rating: Medium to Difficult

Survey

Go through the chapter and quickly glance at headings. Then, read the final paragraph of the chapter. This gives you a general idea of what the chapter covers.

Question

Before you read each headed section, turn the heading into questions. In an American history book, one heading may be “The Battle of Bunker Hill.” A sample question may be, “What significance did this battle have for the American Revolution?” Try to keep your questions broad – using questions that are very narrow in focus can cause you to skip over a lot of important information.

Read

Read the text material with the goal of answering your questions. Searching for the answers helps you to be actively involved in your reading.

Recite

At the end of that headed section, recite (in your own words) the answers to the questions that you formulated. If you have trouble remembering the answer, read through the section again. If you like to take notes while reading, this is the time to do so – after you have read the section and answered your questions.

Review

When you have finished reading the entire chapter, look over the notes that you made for five to ten minutes. Check your memory by covering your notes and reciting the main points out loud.

**Textbook Strategies**

**S-RUN-R**  
**Textbook Rating:** Medium  

Survey  
This method is a less time-consuming version of SQ3R. First, take two to five minutes to survey the chapter as required by SQ 3R, i.e. read the section headings and the last paragraph of the chapter.

Read  
Write the first section heading on a piece of notebook paper (in your notes) in the left margin.

Underline  
After you finish reading a paragraph in that section, think about what was important and underline or highlight that information in the textbook.

Notetaking  
When finished highlighting, take notes on the key information next to the heading that you wrote earlier in your notes. Summarize the highlighted information in your own words.

Review  
Use the review strategies listed under SQ 3R.

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**P 2 R**  
**Textbook Rating:** Easy to Medium  

Preview  
Read the title of the chapter, the introduction, the structured outline (usually provided at the beginning of the chapter), headings of each section, and the summary. In addition, look at all pictures, diagrams, and tables. The goal is to get a general overview of the chapter’s contents and understand the chapter’s organization.

Read Actively  
Simply put, do something while you read. Mark your text by highlighting or by writing notes, formulate recall questions, and write summaries in the margins.

Review  
After you complete a section of reading (remember it is best to divide your reading into 10-page chunks) and at the end of the chapter, do some sort of review activity. One option is to answer the recall questions that you wrote. Another great way to review is to cover the details in the paragraphs with your hand, use the headings as cues, and recite everything that you remember about that topic.

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