

Textbook Reading

PR²: A Reading Formula

This textbook-reading formula can be summarized in the mnemonic PR².

- “P” = pre-reading,
- “R” = reading
- “R” = review.

Repeat the R’s as many times as necessary until the material is learned.

Pre-Reading Activities

There is a WRONG way to read a textbook:

- Glancing at the title
- Plunging right in
- Paying little attention to meaning
- Highlighting or underlining too much; and
- Closing the book right after reading.

If you change ineffective reading practices, you’ll actually save study time. So how do you read the RIGHT way? Well, read on:

Setting a Purpose or Goal

Set a goal for your study session, breaking it up into manageable chunks: “I will spend 30 minutes reading the first 10 pages in the sociology chapter and then review what I read.”

This approach

- sets time limits,
- indicates the amount of reading to be done, and
- promises review time

Surveying

- Look at the headings throughout the chapter
 - These show you the important topics.
 - These will help you understand the organization of the chapter
 - Also, they will help you plan study breaks
- Notice any author highlighted words or phrases.
 - These will probably be important vocabulary words or important ideas.
- Look at the pictures, graphs, tables, charts, etc.
- Read the chapter outline and/or summary (if there is one).

Activating Your Experiences (Schemata)

A schema is the information in your experience or prior knowledge that will help you make sense of what you read.

- As you survey and preview, put the book into a context of your own experience.
- Prior to reading, think about what you already know about the subject.
- This can make reading and retention easier.

Reading the Text

Reading a biology text might require a different reading strategy than reading a sociology text which could require a different approach than a political science text. However, some techniques are used in almost all textbook reading:

- Questioning to guide reading
- Highlighting to remember important information
- Recognizing critical vocabulary
- Identifying important examples
- Increasing comprehension

Questioning To Guide Reading

Asking a question focuses your reading on finding information that will answer the question.

- Try turning the chapter title and section headings into test questions.
- It makes reading a more active search for meaning.
- Asking “what” and “why” questions will most often point the reader to critical content in the text.
- Science, math, English writing classes, and the technologies frequently emphasize “how it happens,” another type of question you can form.

Marking in your Textbook

- IT IS OKAY TO WRITE IN YOUR TEXTBOOKS IN COLLEGE. But efficient note taking or annotation is done **after** a section has been completely read.
- If there are several paragraphs in a section, the main idea of the entire section may not be immediately evident and the supporting details may only be clear after the reading is complete.
- You may want to develop some type of neat marking system, such as annotation. Just highlighting or underlining text is not an active learning technique, writing out main ideas in your own words or re-explaining something in the margins will help you learn the material.

Vocabulary

- Often critical vocabulary words are bolded or underlined in your textbook and provided in a list in the chapter summary.
- Identify technical terms relating to the main idea of the chapter
- Mark the terms in your textbook or make flash cards on 3x5 note cards.
- Words other than important terms, even big, impressive-looking words, are frequently not essential to text meaning. If you understand what you’re reading without looking up these terms, you probably don’t have to worry.

Identifying Important Examples

- Examples in textbooks are for you - they keep you interested and make ideas clearer.
- Use them to help you form a visual image of theories or concepts presented.
- Often research examples that are covered in several sentences or paragraphs are important.

- Also make up your own examples to help you understand concepts--write these in your notes or margins of the text.

Concentration

Maintaining concentration is a very common problem for college students. Over the years students have devised a variety of strategies to improve their concentration. Improving concentration skills should improve comprehension skills.

- Shock Therapy: find something that will jolt you when you find your mind wandering
- Activity Intervention: Break the monotony by deep breathing, or calisthenics, or drinking water.
- Add Pleasing Circumstances: Sip a cup of coffee, place a desk blotter of a pleasing color under your book, read outside, play relaxing music in the background.
 - Choose a distraction reduced environment
 - Study away from family or roommate interruptions
 - Avoid tempting outdoor views
- Establish A Reward System: After completing a specified study time, reward yourself with a snack, a phone call, or 10 minutes of MTV.

Review and Study

The purpose of a review is to get information into long term memory. Use active methods that help you interact or make connections with your textbook and with what you want to learn and retain.

- The goal is not to spend too much time studying your textbook.
- The goal is to get the information from the textbook into your long term memory as efficiently as possible and to keep it there.

Research shows that you should study no more than 30 to 40 minutes without a break. A very effective method of studying uses the last two or three minutes of your 30 to 40 minute study period reviewing what has been learned and the first few minutes of your subsequent study period recalling what has been previously studied.

There are two types of review:

1. Immediate review
2. Periodic review

Immediate Review

When you finish a reading (or study) session, review what you have read immediately.

- Review the chapter headings and try to recall the answers to the questions you formulated when you previewed the textbook chapter.
- If you are unable to answer your questions, reread the notes or annotations you took on that section.
- If your textbook has chapter questions or study guide questions, go through those.

- If you can't come up with a clear answer, reread your notes or annotation on the relevant section or sections.
- If you do not readily come up with the correct answers, check to be sure you have taken notes or annotated the material that the author thought important.

Periodic Review

At regular intervals over the term, review what you have read to make sure that important material is put into long term memory. **Remember most unreviewed material can be forgotten in one day, and up to 80% of what we read in textbooks is lost in two weeks.**

- To retain information, you should schedule review on a regular or periodic basis so that previously learned material is not forgotten.
- Effective students devise various methods of recalling vital information.
 - Mnemonics (such as FACE to help recall the names of the spaces on the treble clef), diagrams, and songs are all devices that help people recall information.
- Effective learners experiment to see what devices or methods work for them. Then they use these devices regularly.
- Predicting test questions is one of the most valuable skills that a student can learn. Review your tests:
 - Did the instructor's questions come from bold face words?
 - Was there a heavy emphasis on researchers? Were any of the study guide questions used on the test?
 - Knowing how your instructor tests can help as you read, mark, and review new textbook material.
- Study groups can be major aids to effective study.
 - Several people getting together to help each other with assignments can frequently spot difficulties and solve problems more quickly than one person studying alone.
- One effective aid to getting important textbook material is the study guide. These guides may add to your book bill, but they are worth it.
 - They usually contain extra problems and/or potential test questions on text material.
 - They also point toward course material you will need to know.

If you need more help with your textbook reading skills, please contact Charles Totten, Academic Skills Coordinator, CASA at 481-0541