

Tips For Reading Textbooks

By Paige Lefont

Reading textbooks may be tedious, but, here are some tips when “hitting the books.”

“Yuck!” If that’s your reply when your teacher tells you to read a chapter in the history book, you’re not alone. Many students, even if they like to read for fun, do not enjoy reading textbooks. Try these tips to make reading for information easier and thus, more enjoyable.

The primary goal of reading textbooks is to discover new information. Take your time to locate the main idea when you are reading. Each paragraph has a main focus. It’s up to you to locate the main point. A good place to look is either in the first or the last sentence of each passage. Also, pay attention to those examples given in the paragraph, even when you’re tempted to skip them. They could help you use what you already know to understand new information.

You can use different techniques to stay focused on the main topic as you read a passage of information. While you are reading, ask yourself questions about the passage. Questioning will help you stay focused on the main points. New vocabulary terms will probably be introduced throughout the passage. You can often determine the meaning of vocabulary terms using the context of the sentence. New words also will guide you to the main emphasis of the passage.

You may come across a passage that’s very challenging. Don’t get frustrated and just skip over the information, use another method to help you understand. Simply, go back and reread the passage slowly. As you are reading, create a mental image of the information being presented. You could also summarize the passage either orally or in written form. You might feel silly doing this, but reading the passage aloud may assist you in understanding information. Discussing the material with someone else can also be helpful. If all else fails, take a mental break. Put the book down and pick it up later to read again.

"Label In The Margin"

Did you ever find yourself reading a chapter in a textbook and not being able to remember what you read? There is a sure way to remedy this. It’s called *"label in the margin."*

- You should begin by **surveying** what you are about to read. Look at the major heading, the charts and pictures, read the summary, study the review questions. In addition, search your memory for anything you already know about what your assigned reading. The more you know about what you’re reading, the easier it will be to process it into your long-term memory.
- **Read only one paragraph at a time**, and before you begin to read that paragraph look for a reason to read the paragraph. Use clues such as the heading or topic sentence. **Do not mark as your read.**
- When you finish the paragraph, put yourself in the position of your professor. What test question will you ask from that paragraph? Actually **write that question in the margin of your textbook.**
- **Now mark the answer to the question** by underlining, numbering, boxing, circling, etc.
- Want to make sure you always do well on pop quizzes and cut down on study time for major tests? Put this information in your long-term memory now by **covering the text and asking yourself the question written in the margin.**
- **Recite the answer** in your own words.
- You are now ready to **read the next paragraph.**

It may take you longer to read a chapter this way, but there are definite advantages:

- You can read it a bit at a time—a page here and a page there—taking advantage of short periods of time you usually waste or didn’t have time for a whole chapter.
- You never have to re-read the chapter.
- You know the test questions in advance.
- You have a systematic way to study your textbook.

SQ4R*

An important part of being in rigorous courses is *learning to learn*. **SQ4R** is one strategy that can help you get the most out of your textbook reading. Pursued systematically and consistently, **SQ4R** will assure that you don't just "do it," when it comes to your reading assignments; you will derive as much as you possibly can out of the experience.

Survey

(Overview: quickly look through the chapter for the main idea or the author's unifying theme)

- ☞ Table of Contents
- ☞ Introduction/Summary; first sentence of a paragraph
- ☞ Headings (memorize if possible)
- ☞ Pictures, charts, diagrams, etc.
- ☞ Vocabulary lists, notated print, captions, etc.

Question

(Establish a purpose. Begin to think about the material.)

- ☞ Turn headings and subheadings into questions.
- ☞ Read all questions within the chapter/text.
- ☞ Try to guess at the answers.

Read

(to answer the questions)

- ☞ Carefully read (in manageable chunks) to answer questions.
- ☞ Correct incorrect guesses from early questioning.
- ☞ Note important details and relationships of ideas.

Recite

(answers to questions with the book closed)

- ☞ State *orally* answers to questions.
- ☞ State key facts and concepts.
- ☞ Reread any areas which are unclear.

Rite

(Take notes!)

- ☞ Take accurate notes on basic concepts.
- ☞ Prepare a study sheet for exams.
- ☞ Use outline, idea line, split paper method, etc.

Review

(at short intervals)

- ☞ Review notes.
- ☞ Be able to answer all questions.
- ☞ Predict test questions and answer them.