

How to Read a Textbook: Some General Suggestions

1. Always read the assignment BEFORE going to class! Why?
 - you'll be able to take better notes in class because the material will be familiar to you
 - you won't get behind in your reading - reading one chapter is "doable" but trying to catch up on 6 chapters seems like a monumental task
 - you'll be able to connect the text with the lecture and discover what points are emphasized in both
 - you'll be able to ask questions in class about the text material
2. Read your most difficult textbooks when you are most alert.
3. Be realistic in how much reading you tackle at one sitting. It's probably not realistic to expect to read 75 pages of history without a break. Divide long reading assignments into smaller chunks and do one part at a time.
4. Try reading for 50 minutes and taking a 10 minute break.
5. Mark up your textbook! You may have been told in high school never to make a mark in your texts. But you own your books now, and marking your text is part of the valuable process of identifying the most important points in your reading.
6. If you buy used textbooks, try to buy ones with as little marking as possible. How do you know that the previous owner's highlighting reflects what is really important in a chapter? And putting your own marking system on top of someone else's can get confusing.
7. Resign yourself to the fact that reading a chapter once is rarely enough.

THE (MODIFIED) SQ3R METHOD OF TEXTBOOK READING

S - SURVEY - look at the chapter as a whole before you begin to read. Notice major headings and key words. Is this chapter too long to read all at once? Do you need to break it down into smaller chunks? What resources are there in the textbook? Is there a glossary in the back of the book? Appendices? Look for a chapter review at the end, or study questions. They'll give you an idea of what important things you're looking for in the chapter.

Q- QUESTION - what major points is the author trying to get across in this chapter? What are you supposed to learn? Always pay attention to the introduction to a chapter - it may give a good summary and/or state the author's purpose.

R - READ - read the first time for general understanding. This can be done relatively quickly to get an overview of the material. Read actively. Look up words you don't know.

R - REVIEW - read the material again with a highlighter in your hand. Read a whole paragraph before you highlight anything, then decide what in that paragraph is most important. Your highlighted main ideas and supporting details will be what you reread when you review for a test. If everything is highlighted, you will have to reread the whole chapter as if it were new material. Pay attention to:

- the first sentence in a paragraph - it's often the main idea
- headings and sub-headings
- key terms and definitions
- the main idea explained
- lists
- formulas
- people
- important dates
- charts, diagrams, picture captions - lots of information may be contained there

Then, take the points you highlighted, turn them into test questions and write them in the margin of your textbook (or on another sheet of paper if there's not room in the margin). You now have a study guide for the test on that material!

R - RECITE - the most overlooked aspect of studying. See if you can give answers without looking. Can you answer the questions you wrote in the margins? Can you answer study questions at the end of the chapter or chapter sections? If not, go back and look for answers.

REPETITION IS THE KEY TO RETENTION!