

READING TEXTBOOKS EFFECTIVELY

Read in three steps

1. **Survey** the material by reading the titles, sub-titles, bold print, italics, definitions, topic sentences, summaries, and conclusions. *Why?* If you give your mind a general framework of main ideas and structure, you will be better able to comprehend and retain the details you will read later. *After previewing* you should be able to say: What this is mainly about. How it is organized. How difficult it is. About how long it will take to read.
2. Form **questions** out of the titles and sub-titles using the Six Keys to Reading—who, what, when, why, where, and how. This gives you a purpose for your reading and improves concentration. Then, **read** actively to select what you want to learn. Indicate your selection by underlining words or phrases you wish to remember and by making marginal notes.
3. **Recall** the material you have selected or marked for learning in order to assimilate it. This process enables you to effectively retain the ideas you selected. After reading each small section of material you can: recall mentally or recite orally, ask yourself questions and answer them in your own words, make separate notes or outlines of what you have read.

Spend half of your reading and study time reading and reciting the information

The final test of learning is in communicating what you have studied or experienced. Passive reading is mere impression. Therefore, in an hour of study, the individual who spends half of the time trying to write, say, or think about what he or she has read will be able to reproduce twice as many ideas as the individual who spends all of the time in passive reading. After you have read your book, close it and attempt to recall what you have read, review to fill in any gaps in your knowledge or find the right words to express the ideas, retest yourself, and review again. The cycle is to read and recite, read and recite, and read and recite until you feel confident in your knowledge of the material.

Know what you are supposed to learn

While surveying a chapter, you can obtain a perspective in evaluating the merits of various ideas. Usually, an instructor has certain preferences that you should discover from his or her emphasis in lectures, from questions asked in class or, if necessary, from private conferences. In addition to the instructor's preferences, however, most topics have general requirements that must be learned. Questions will vary from subject to subject, but illustrative "must-answers" are:

- What are the chief characteristics of this?
- Define it.
- What are the causes?
- What are the theories or the hypotheses?
- What are the results of this?
- How is this classified?
- How is this similar or how does it differ from such and such?
- What is the relationship of this to something else studied?

In other words, a student's understanding of a topic may be examined. It is better that you examine yourself before the instructor does so by asking such questions as: who, what, why, when, where, how, explain, compare, define, give the causes of, name the results of, illustrate, give reasons for, identify and classify).

Review when forgetting is greatest

Most academic learning fades away unless it is used or reviewed. The greatest amount of forgetting usually occurs within the first 24 hours after study. Therefore, lecture notes taken today or material read today should be reviewed today. This normally takes 10 to 20 minutes per subject.

Review frequently

Because of delayed recall (the examinations next month and the finals), periodic review is necessary. An hour's review often results in as much actual learning as five or six hours of original study. A short weekly review of about 30 minutes for all notes taken that week will pay high dividends on all examinations and in more permanent learning for use in later years.

Space your learning

Studying two hours a day five days a week for four weeks ordinarily results in more learning than 40 hours of study crammed into a four-day period. Learning is assimilation, a settling process, growth—all of which require time.

Know word meanings

Precise word meaning is basic to the understanding of an assignment. Use a dictionary or the glossary in your text to find the definition of a word used in your text or in a lecture. Both a general and a specific vocabulary are necessary for understanding most university subjects.

Make ideas meaningful

Ideas from books become more meaningful when you have paraphrased them. When you have a ready example, illustration, application, comparison, contrast and classification, ideas become more meaningful when related to other ideas, when reacted to, when analyzed, compared and synthesized. Many ideas may be expressed as a single general principle. Thus reading and studying—learning and reproducing—are dependent on thinking.

Supplementary reading may add meaning to assignments

When textbooks or lectures are difficult, reading in books with simpler vocabulary or with more pictures, illustrations or definitions may permit you to clarify your text or lecture notes. As you extend your meanings, both reading and speed comprehension improve. One of the best practices for improving the speed of reading, which is the problem of many college students, is to read widely in more elementary books related to the field of difficulty.

Learn of other aids in reading and studying

A study schedule helps most students to spend their time wisely and ensure adequate time for study. A regular place for study, particularly one that is quiet and well lit, aids in learning and personal efficiency. Learning to use an index may save much time otherwise spent in thumbing through a book to locate forgotten ideas. Proper visual functioning, motivation, health and seeing value in what is being studied—all of these are conducive to economy in reading, study and learning.

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