

How to Master College Textbook Reading: Techniques for Faster, Deeper Understanding

What do we know about college textbooks?

- They are “idea dense”
- They include many ideas, facts, terms, diagrams, resources, and more
- They are generally written at a higher reading level than high school textbooks, and
- Students have less time to digest the information (courses are more fast-paced and cover more material than high school)

Did you know that reading involves both physical and mental preparation?

The goal of reading:

- Comprehension
- Understanding
- Assimilation
- Remembering the material (learning the concepts beyond the point of recognition)

To reach these goals you must be an active reader.

Active reading involves thinking about the material as you read it. Use your textbook to do the following for each assigned reading.

- Preview the section to be covered in lecture (preview=skim, read headings and vocab words, look at diagrams, do this in 20-30 minutes)
- Go to class (take notes, have textbook handy)
- After class, complete the full reading (take breaks if the section/chapter is long)
- Take notes to indicate important information
- In a second full reading, **highlight** and/or underline
- Use end-of-chapter summaries and questions provided in the textbook to check understanding of the material
- Turn headings into questions and answer the questions as a way to quiz yourself

The following sections outline a variety of reading techniques. Some of the techniques are for specific types of textbooks/courses. Keep in mind that not every technique works for every student. Try each technique to see which works best for you.

Reading Strategy P2R (Preview, Read, Review)

1) PREVIEW for approximately 15-20 minutes

Preview the chapter and focus on:

- Headings
- Bold print (i.e., vocabulary terms)
- Pictures, tables, and graphs
- Chapter summaries
- Questions at the end of the section/chapter

Ask yourself:

- What aspects of the reading look familiar?
- What will be difficult to grasp?

2) READ (actively)

- Question what you are reading while reading
- Think: What are the important points? What are the supporting details?

Read for 20-30 minutes at a time (reading for longer makes it difficult to focus)

- Take short breaks, no more than 5-10 minutes

Marking in the textbook

- When you come across an idea you do not understand, make a note in the margin so you can ask a question in class or visit the professor during office hours

What is important to know about highlighting, underlining, and note-taking?

- Avoid over-highlighting, wait until the second read-through
- Highlight and/or underline only after you have read a paragraph
- Highlight or underline from left to right so that you read the sentence or key phrase again

3) REVIEW: When you have completed the reading, do not immediately close the book

- Summarize the main point in your own words
- Make a list of terms and definitions
- Make a review sheet for each section or major concept that can be used for exam preparation
- Make flashcards for difficult concepts or processes

- Draw out each step of a process as a concept map to help visualize what is happening
- Use the headings as questions and answer them as if they were test questions
- If there are sample questions at the end of a text, answer them
- If there are online tools (i.e., website), use a resource to test yourself

Reading Strategy: SQ3R **(Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review)**

The SQ3R is similar to the P2R strategy. For individual steps, see above.

- The steps are performed on each section rather than at the end of a chapter
- The process is effective for more complex material, but is time consuming
- Because these steps are performed more frequently, SQ3R provides a great deal of interaction and repetition with content

Reading Strategy PRESP **(Preview, Read Examples, Summarize, Problems)**

This strategy is best used with math or math-based science textbooks:

- Have pencil and paper ready to organize information and work on problems
- Break the reading into small chunks
- Work for 20-30 minutes at a time

1) Preview the section/chapter, focus on:

- Headings
- Figures
- Examples
- Questions
- Key Terms
- Summaries at the end of each section/chapter
- What do the homework problems look like?

2) Read actively, focus on:

- Laws
- Definitions
- Theorems
- Equations
- Processes

Write topics on flash cards or create a review sheet for each major concept. Work on example problems:

- Copy the problem and solve it

- Check your answer and solution method with the text
- Do you understand each step?
- Can you work backwards to check the answer?

3) Summarize, look at the review sheets and explain each of the following in your own words:

- Major law
- Rule
- Theorem
- Equation
- Definition
- Process

4) Do the assigned homework problems that go with the reading:

- Use your review sheet
- If you get stuck, re-read the associated section and example problem(s)
 - Ask the professor in class or go to office hours for clarification