

Reading Comprehension

SQ3R A Study/Reading System

Survey * Question * Read * Recite * Review

These steps are a study/reading method that promotes an active attitude toward learning. When you clear your mind for the task of studying, you are alert and centered. You make yourself ready to learn and remember.

Survey

- Gather the information necessary to focus and formulate goals.
- State your purpose for reading the material.
- Read the title - help your mind prepare to receive the subject at hand.
- Read the introduction and/or summary. Pick out the chapter's main points.
- Notice each boldface heading and subheadings. Organize your mind before you begin to read and build a structure for the thoughts and details to come.
- Skim over graphs, tables, charts, etc., to see how they support and explain the text.

Question

- Help your mind engage and concentrate
- Frame questions, perhaps variations of the headings, sub-headings, or topic sentences, which you make into your personal questions.

Read

- Read actively to answer your questions and to fulfill your purpose
- Set realistic time goals and number of pages to be read.
- Divide chapter into small sections, rather than trying to read the whole chapter non-stop.
- Ask yourself a question before each paragraph or section, and then locate the answer in the text.
- Take breaks when you feel unable to stay with the material due to daydreaming, boredom, hunger, etc.
- Use your hand and marking pen to pull your eyes down the page, marking only the essential words and phrases.
- Think, interpret, and analyze the first time you read, to avoid unnecessary re-reading.

Recite

- Retain your mind to concentrate and learn as it reads
- After each section, stop, look away from the book, recall your questions, and see if you can answer from memory.
- If not, look back again, but do not go on to the next section until you can recite the answers.
- Also, try to visualize what you have just read.
- Make separate notes or outlines of what you have read.

Review

- Refine your mental organization and begin building memory
- Once you have completed the whole chapter
 - Reread your outline, look away, and recite the outline from memory.
 - Go back over all your questions.
 - Continue this process until you feel that you understand and know the material.
 - Take a short break and reward your success.
 - Decide when you are ready to work again, center your thoughts, take a few minutes to review the information you just learned, and go on to the next chapter or another subject.

Tips on underlining a textbook

Tools

- Pen and straight edge
- Highlighter
- Note paper

Purposes

- Study begins when you decide what you will learn. When you underline, you decide what you will learn.
- If you underline accurately, you will be able to review and make notes more easily.

Guides for underlining

- Read an entire section first.
- Turn major headings and sub-headings into questions.
- Do not underline too much.
- Select information you want to learn to make into notes.
- Make major points stand out clearly.
- Use numbers
- Use double underlining.
- Use stars.
- Make margin notes.
- Use key words.
- Use brief summaries.
- Make questions if you do not understand, so that you can return to that section.
- Realize that introductions rarely contain material that needs to be underlined.
- Underline the condensed answer.
- Answers may include information in:
 - Topic sentences.
 - Words printed in special type.
 - Numbered lists.
- Pay attention to and be aware of words of transition, introduction, conclusion, and definition (in other words, accordingly, since, then, of course, but, yet, more important, likewise, besides, for these reasons, subsequently, afterwards, that is, that means, etc.)
- Should see major facts in an outline form.
- Use brackets when several lines are important to underline.
- Use numbers when a series of ideas are important.
- Mark a question mark beside unclear sections of information.
- Write down questions in your notebook for class that you have for the Professor.

Taking Notes on Reading

Taking notes on reading requires the same skills that apply to class notes: observation, reading, and review. Below are some hints on when to take notes from reading.

- When you need more extensive notes than you can write in the margin of the text.
- When you are reading from a library book, etc.

Methods to use

- Outlining - works best when material you are reading is organized.
- Cornell method - divide paper: notes on right half, left hand column for key words and questions, summary at bottom of page.
- Paragraph form - summarize what you read in your own words, include important terms.
- Mind maps - diagrams/summaries of overlapping lecture and text material.

Suggestions

Style/method of note taking should vary according to the material.

- Short story or poem:
 - Read the entire thing once without taking notes.
 - Write down your immediate impressions.
 - Reread the piece, taking notes on characters, plots, etc.
- Scientific/technical material:
 - Copy important formulas, terms, etc.
 - Recreate or note page number of important diagrams or figures.

Reading Speed and Effectiveness

Considerations and limitations

- When time demands and purpose permits, you must possess the ability to “switch gears” (absorb the ideas and information in books at more rapid speeds).
- This high-level fast reading however should not be interpreted as applicable to all types of reading situations.

Causes of slow reading speeds

- Individual variables: intelligence, motivation, physiological and psychological traits.
- Deficiencies in vocabulary and comprehension levels required for the reading.
- Inflexibility: tendency to read everything the same way regardless of what it is.
- Passivity: failure to become involved with the material being read.
- Unnecessary and habitual regression or re-reading because of lack of concentration.
- Slow reaction time to reading material.

Getting started

- Determine the purpose of the assignment.
- Preview the selection to determine its difficulty.
- Be flexible. Determine how to read an assignment by its difficulty and purpose.
- Understand that there are many reading speeds, and pace yourself.
- Get ready to read.
 - Sit at a desk or table
 - You may need to shut down your computer if it is on your desk. This will avoid the distractions of E-mail and Instant Messenger
 - Do not sit on the couch.
 - Set a time limit, but be realistic. Look at how many pages you have to read.
- Concentrate. If you push your rate up to capacity, you will not have time to think about other things and allow your mind to wander.
- Try a self-pacing method
 - Use an index card, ruler, or straight edge and move it down the page as you read.
 - OR-
 - Move your finger or pencil point down the margin beside the lines you are reading.
- Relax—it promotes concentration.

How to Read a Difficult Book

- Skim the book first
 - Look at the title page and any sub-titles.
 - Look at the table of contents to get a sense of the structure.
 - Look for things you understand.
- Start Reading.
 - Read over difficult material a second time.
 - If you still do not understand it, move on to something else or take a break and come back to it.
 - Look for the important words.
- Stop at the end of each paragraph or section and paraphrase in your own words what you just read.
- Read out loud. Hearing what we read is like reading it a second time.
- Meet with your instructor and discuss your confusion. Point out the paragraphs you found hardest to understand.
- Find a tutor.
- Use another text. Concepts are sometimes easier to understand if expressed in a different way.
- Read with a dictionary in your lap.
- Pretend you understand, and then explain it to someone else or even yourself.
- Do not get stressed over difficult material.
- Read footnotes, arguments, and references.

Interactive Activity

Here is passage on the history of Penn State. Use the reading comprehension tips and answer the questions below. (From The Penn State Experience: A freshman guide to life outside the classroom, Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999)

In 1855, the Pennsylvania legislature chartered the Farmer's High School. At the first trustee's meeting, the main order of business was obtaining a location for the school. The board considered proposals from five people who were willing to provide 200 or more acres of land.

Among the offers was that of General James Irvin of Bellefonte, who could provide a 200-acre tract of land from his large holdings. All five locations were visited, and the committee ultimately accepted Irvin's offer after local citizens sweetened the deal by pledging an additional \$10,000 for the school.

An architect was hired to design the main building, a five-story stone structure composed of three wings, with rooms for up to 400 students, faculty living quarters and classrooms. With \$100,000 from various sources, construction began. Tuition and room & board charges were fixed at \$100 per year, and on February 16, 1859, 69 students arrived to begin their studies. The school's address was simply, "Farm School."

In 1887, the first student newspaper was published. "Free Lance" was a monthly publication and sold for 15 cents. In 1941, the Nittany Lion Shrine was commissioned with the 1940 Class Gift. Heinz Warnake was selected to sculpt the Lion, and he worked on campus in full view of the students. IT was completed in four months, carved from a 13-ton block of limestone. In the 1980s, a cast of the lion was made and stored in an undisclosed location after part of an ear was broken off.

In 1947, Henry Varnum Poor finished the first of Old Main's frescoes, depicting the signing of the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 that paved the way for Penn State's land grant mission of outreach to the citizens of Pennsylvania.

In 1982, Penn State won its first NCAA football championship and a second in 1986 to celebrate its 100th Anniversary in the sport. Penn State joined the Big Ten Conference in 1992 in all sports and to facilitate academic progress among the Big Ten institutions.

In 1997, Penn State reorganized its Commonwealth Educational System. In its place, it established a "Commonwealth College" with 14 campuses and allowed the formation of three additional colleges: Berks-Lehigh Valley College, Abington College and Altoona College. These new academic colleges can establish a limited number of four-year baccalaureate programs that will benefit their communities.

Activity Questions

- When was Penn State founded?

- What was the original name of Penn State?

- Penn State acquired land from what man?

- When was the Lion Shrine commissioned?

- Who finished the first of Old Main's frescoes?

- What were the three additional colleges in 1997?

- When did Penn State win its first NCAA football championship?

- What did Penn State join in 1992 in all sports and to facilitate academic progress among other institutions?