



## WHAT ARE THE TWO COMMON PROBLEMS STUDENTS LIKE ME HAVE WHEN READING TEXTBOOKS?

1. **Procrastination!** Do you find it takes you 15 minutes or so to settle down to actually read the text?
2. **Short attention span!** Research has shown that a typical new college student has the attention span for reading a textbook of about **5** minutes! That's not very long, is it?

Textbook reading is hard work, and almost everyone needs to improve that skill.

## SO WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THAT?

- **Have a “before-you-read” plan.** Here are some strategies for avoiding procrastination and for lengthening your attention span.
  - **Survey** the pages to be read and look for headings, key words or sentences that give a clue as to what the reading is about. You need to have an overview or a purpose for your reading. It helps to stay connected and not let your mind wander.
  - **Ask yourself questions** such as “*What do I need to know from this reading assignment?*” and “*What’s the purpose of this reading?*” and “*What do I need to get out of it?*” helps you to focus.
  - Ask yourself “**How will this reading material be used in my course?**” Will it be...
    - ✓ Referred to in lectures?
    - ✓ Included in class discussions?
    - ✓ Required knowledge on my assignments?
    - ✓ Test question(s)?
  - Know **which reading strategy** below you’re supposed to use. Each one involves a different approach to your reading.
    - ✓ Are you supposed to be reading to critically evaluate the material? Then look for causes and effects, evaluating ideas, etc.
    - ✓ Are you supposed to be reading for comprehension? Then look for general ideas and specific ideas and examples.
    - ✓ Are you supposed to be reading for practical applications? Then look for useful information to apply toward a specific goal.
- Use a pen or pencil as you read. Don’t be afraid to **mark in your textbook**. It’s far better to mark in it for remembering purposes than it is to keep it clean and neat for resale. Otherwise, at test time and review time, you’ll have to reread that unmarked text as if it were brand new.
  - **Be selective.** Usually no more than 10-15% of the text should be underlined or highlighted. To prevent too much being marked, read the section first before going at it with your pen or highlighter.
  - **Ask yourself**, as you go along, questions such as, “Am I picking out the main ideas?” and “Am I making connections between important ideas?”
- **Avoid distractions.** There are internal as well as external distractions. Do you know yours and do you do something about them?
  - Usually it’s best to **read alone**, away from others who are not in a study mode like you are.

- Tackle your reading time (as well as study time) at about the **same time and the same place** everyday. It becomes an unconscious habit, and your mind automatically knows what to do when it gets to that place and time. It takes less time then to get focused and down to business.
- **Check your study area.** For example, are you facing a window or other people so that you get distracted by what's going on around you?
- Get the **right mindset** at the beginning. Be aware of your self-talk. For example:
  - Instead of telling yourself, *"I can't understand this,"* think positive. *"I can learn this material. I'm a capable reader."*
  - Instead of telling yourself, *"I hate this book (or this class). It's so boring,"* think positive. *"It may not be the most exciting class, but I will find something valuable and new in what I'm about to read."*

**Remember—WHATEVER YOU FOCUS ON IS THE DIRECTION YOU WILL GO!**

### SO WHAT OTHER IDEAS DO YOU HAVE?

Be an **active reader**. If you're passive, your eyes will just move over the words and you won't absorb much at all. Become involved in your reading by...

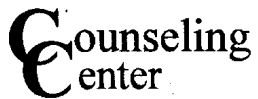
- Mentally **turn textbook headings** into who, what, where, why, and how questions before you start reading the section.
- Making a habit to stop at **short intervals and quiz yourself** over what you just read. Ask yourself questions like *What's the main message here? What are the main points? How do they tie in with prior material on this topic?*
- Being sure to **read and review in a well-timed way**. Instructors assume that you've read the assigned material and have gotten an understanding before you come into class. Also use the time before and right after the class session to study. It helps with putting the concepts into long term memory.
- \* **Integrate** the new reading material. Look for connections between new stuff and what you've already learned from your text and from your lecture.

### WHAT CAN I DO IF THE READING IS GETTING "FOGGY" OR DIFFICULT?

- **Read it again.** Maybe you'll have to sleep on it or watch a short TV program. Your mind can work on those concepts while you rest or play.
- Look for just the **essential words**. Mentally cross out all the adjectives and adverbs, and read the sentence without them. Often the important words are verbs and nouns.
- Hold a **mini-review**. Stop at the end of each paragraph and say in your own words what you've read. If you can't say it in your own words, you didn't "get it." Go back at it again.
- Read it **aloud** or try **standing up**. Sometimes just changing positions can help.
- **Pretend** you understand it and then **explain it out loud**. We often understand more than we think we do.
- Learn how to **discover the main ideas** by using the text's bold headings. The bold headings are a valuable tool for you. Use them to your advantage.
- \*Remember, comprehension is built by **adding new knowledge to knowledge you already have**. Are you integrating the new with the old (see above)?
- You do know, don't you, that some texts may require some extra work and extra concentration? "Good readers are **flexible** readers."

### SO WHAT CAN I DO IF I NEED MORE HELP THAN WHAT I'VE JUST READ HERE?

The counselors in the Counseling Center have more information and tips to share. Just let them know. Or you can attend one of the academic success workshops held each semester in the Success Center. Pick up a schedule of Success Center workshops for days and times.



# READING TEXTBOOKS

(part two)



## The \*"PQRST METHOD" of Reading a Textbook

The "PQRST" method is a step-by-step plan that has been proven to raise test scores for students who follow the steps involved.

**"P"=PREVIEW—THE FIRST STEP—Getting the big, overall picture.**

If you perform this step correctly, you will get a general picture and see the main ideas the author is trying to get across. Knowing this ahead of time, you will be able to look for and recognize the most important points when you do read for details. You won't waste time stumbling through your book and finding a starting point.

**What to preview**—when your first get your book at the **beginning of the semester**...

Look at the **title page** and carefully read the **introductory** material. The introduction gives you an idea of the purpose of the book and its special features.

Preview the **table of contents**. You'll see how the book is organized, and it can often give you a preview of the chapters to come.

The back part of the book often has the **appendix** (supplementary material), the **glossary** (a mini dictionary), **references** or **bibliography** (often valuable if you have to write a research paper or speech), and the **index** (the alphabetical listing of important names, terms, events, etc. found throughout the textbook). You will be glad later that you know these helpful parts are there for you when you need them.

**What to preview**—when you open your book **to start a new chapter**, read the...

- title of the chapter
- chapter objectives
- visual aids (graphs, pictures, etc. that give you a general idea of the chapter content)
- headings and subheadings (usually in bold and/or larger print or in italics)
- chapter introduction
- notes in the margins
- terminology
- chapter study questions
- chapter summary

This doesn't take as long as you think it will. The more you do it, the more efficient you get.

**"Q"=QUESTION—THE SECOND STEP—Gives you a purpose for reading, reading to answer your questions.**

This is a step that you actually do while previewing. Formulate a question for each chapter title, heading or subheading in the chapter. Use the standard *who, what, why, which, when, where* or *how*.

## **“R”—READ—THE THIRD STEP—Read carefully and react to what you read.**

Reading is also a thinking process. After you’ve read a paragraph—or as you get better at this—read a section at a time; then stop and think about what you have just read. Ask yourself questions such as, “What was the main point there? What details are important to know?” So read a section, stop and think about the section, and ask questions of yourself about it.

Your mind is not going to soak up that knowledge without effort on your part.

## **“S”—STATE—THE FOURTH STEP—This pretty much guarantees comprehension, helps to put what you’re learning into long-term memory, and avoids passive reading on your part.**

This is one of the most important and valuable steps in the reading method. If you decide to skip any of the other steps, don’t skip this one!

How to do it? After you’ve read a paragraph; stop, look away, and say in your own words what you just read. If you can express the author’s ideas in your own words, you can feel comfortable that you understand what you just read and can put the information to use. If you cannot, you need to go back and read it again with more focus and concentration. Then do the **STATE** step again.

It is important to state out loud. This provides another sensory input for the memory process.

Some students who are good at rote memory, can pretty much say verbatim what they just read and be quite accurate. Parrots can do this too but there is no comprehension involved.

When you put into your own words what you read, try to think how the concept(s) apply to situations and even to possible test questions.

You will get more efficient at this the more you do this step. At first, try just a paragraph and as you get better at it (and it really does not take up much time), you can lengthen out to a section/passage at a time.

## **“T”—TEST—THE FIFTH STEP—A shortened run-through of the STATE step, done later for purposes of review.**

Sometime **after your first reading** of the material, you will want to check yourself to see if you recall what was in it and what the important concepts were.

How do I do this? As you review, go back and look at notes you made in the margins and in the text, look at the headings, etc. (things you did during the first reading). Try to reconstruct the material you identified as important. Can you recall it?

This review should once again be done in a **reflective** manner—don’t just move your eyes over the material. Memory doesn’t just happen because your eyes moved over it two or three times. You need to react and actively think about it.

If you perform this **TEST** step accurately, you will have converted what you have studied from your short-term memory into long-term learning.

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