

Reading Strategies

Students are required to do a great deal of reading as a part of their coursework assignments. This type of reading is very different from reading for pleasure. It requires that you read with a purpose and demands a different level of involvement. Reading of this type can be dense, difficult, and sometimes confusing. The following paragraphs are included to help you think specifically about your reading process and encourage you to develop your own system for reading classroom materials. You will review the importance of becoming an "active" reader, be introduced to a reading system called SQ3R, and review a series of useful tips and reminders.

Part One: Becoming an Active Reader

Students often try to read course materials using the same mindset they do when reading for pleasure. They start at the beginning, work through to the end, read everything once, and expect the material to engage them and hold their attention. As a result, they are easily distracted, lose concentration, and miss much of what is important. The key to becoming an active reader is learning to engage with the text. Try the following steps to help you connect with the material.

- Break reading assignments up into manageable parts. No reading session should exceed the length of time you are able to concentrate. If you feel your concentration slipping, take a break or change tasks.
- Read with a purpose. Know what it is the instructor expects you to learn from the reading. As you read each paragraph ask yourself - what was in that paragraph that I needed to know? Look for main ideas, facts, reasons, and examples.
- Read with a highlighter and pencil. When you own the book, highlight important words, definitions, ideas, and information. But resist the urge to highlight too much. It is seldom a good idea to highlight whole sentences, let alone an entire paragraph. Instead, use a pencil to connect ideas, build outlines, circle ideas, and summarize in the margins. Try to develop a consistent pattern for marking readings. When you don't own the text, take notes on a separate page, but be sure to include identifying information such as title, headings, and page numbers. The act of writing as you read causes you to engage with the material in a second way and aids in retention.
- Review your notes. Once you have completed an assignment review your notes and markings in total. This process helps transfer information from short-term to long-term memory.

Part Two: SQ3R

SQ3R is an acronym for Survey-Question-Read-Recite-Review. This method was developed over 50 years ago, by Francis Robinson, as a textbook reading system. Today many people still find these ideas useful. In the years since, other systems have emerged,

but they all share in one form or another the common elements of previewing, reading, and reviewing what Robinson first described.

- Survey the material. This means preview the chapter. Look it over from start to finish, determine how long it is, and read the introduction, black headings and subheadings. Even read the summary and the questions and assignments at the end of the chapter. This is the best way to find out what is important in the chapter. Remember, this is not a pleasure read where you don't want to uncover the surprise ending. You want to know as much as you can before you start.

- Develop your own questions about the material. Using words such as "who", "when", "where", "how", and "why", turn bold headings and sub-headings into questions. Write these down as you go.

- Read. Focus on your questions and read carefully. Work paragraph-to-paragraph, being sure to understand and comprehend what you are reading. However, remain flexible enough to work sentence to sentence when you must. Use a highlighting and marking system to reinforce your understanding.

- Recite. Before moving on to the next paragraph recite, out loud and in your own words, what you have learned. This insures that you can explain the information clearly and engages the auditory function of the brain. The more sense you can use in learning, the more memory paths you create.

- Review. When you have finished the chapter or section, go back to the written questions you developed. Can you recite the correct answers? If not, consult your notes and try again.

SQ3R can be a time consuming process at first, but it works. Keep at it, modify it to meet your needs, and you will find you spend less time reviewing and have improved recall on tests and quizzes.

Part Three: Tips and Reminders

- Avoid marathon-reading sessions. Take frequent breaks.

- Be comfortable, but not too comfortable. You need to be in a warm, well-lit area free of distractions. Find a location where you can comfortably notate and highlight what you are reading.

- Reread difficult passages until you understand. If the vocabulary is confusing, look up the definitions, and replace these words with more familiar substitutes to promote a quicker grasp of the ideas. Don't be afraid to ask your instructor!

- When reading prose or narrative literature, develop questions surrounding setting, theme, plot, and resolution.

- When reading an essay or theme, develop questions surrounding the thesis, purpose, ideas, and relationships. Be sure to be forming your own opinions as you read.
- Read aloud, especially difficult passages. It will slow you down and allow you to engage the auditory function of the brain.
- Intend to remember.
- Look for an organizational pattern in the writing. Does the author consistently make use of chronology, comparisons, definitions, causes/effects or examples?
- Add numbers to readings to help organize the author's main points.
- Pay particular attention to pictures, illustrations, charts, diagrams, or auxiliary information of any kind.