How To Read A Textbook

The following strategy, SQ4R, is built around the idea that what you do before and after you read is as important as the reading itself. Learning is an active process which requires concentration and energy. Understanding and using the following strategies will increase your comprehension and your retention of the information.

Survey -
Look over a chapter for a few minutes before studying it in depth.
- Read the title and introductory paragraph(s). Often the introduction to the chapter supplies background for recognizing the purpose of the chapter. It may also state specifically the method of development the author intends to follow.
- Read headings, subheadings, and italicized words. Go through the chapter heading by heading; these will form a topical outline.
- Read the summary at the end of the chapter. Reread it to see which ideas the author restates for special emphasis or what general conclusions he or she comes to. If there is no summary, read the last sentence or two before each new heading.

Question -
Formulate questions before you read the material.
- Turn each heading and subtitle into a question. Form questions from all three sections of the "Levels of Comprehension" attached at the end of the packet (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?). You should be able to answer these questions when you finish reading and studying the paragraph, section, or chapter.
- Restate the questions from headings to help fix them in your mind. These questions give purpose to your reading. Remember that reading is thinking, and good students think while they read.

Read -
Read the material.
- Read only the material covered under one heading or subheading at a time, and look for the answers to your questions.
- Read ideas, not just words.
- Take only minimal notes while reading.
- Read aggressively, with the intent of getting answers, of noting supporting details, and of remembering.

Recite -
Do "question-read-recite" for each subheading.
- Answer the questions that you raised before you began to read. Answer fully, and be sure to include the reasons the author believes the answer is true. Recall the answer and do not refer to the book.
- Tell yourself the major concept(s) of the section. Put the ideas into your own words. In order to transfer a greater portion of the material you read from your short-term to long-term memory, you must do something active with the information to help "attach" it to your memory. If you take time after reading each section of the chapter to recite the information, you will ensure that more of it goes into long-term memory.

Record -
Take notes from the reading.
- After having read a section and reflected on what you have read and questioned yourself about the material, you are ready to take notes. Taking notes at this point in time will almost ensure that you are noting the important parts of the section. Go back over the paragraphs and highlight or underline only the main ideas and supporting details with no more than 10-15% of the page highlighted.

Review -
Review the material.
- Look over your notes and the headings and subheadings in the text. Get an overall view of the main points.
- Recall supporting details under each main point.
- Predict test questions based on these main points, especially questions which would fall into the critical and creative levels of reading comprehension. Try true/false and completion-type questions from details. Essay questions are easy to make from the main headings. Answer your test questions.

*Remember, the more senses you use in storing your information, the better your retrieval and retention!

*Francis P. Robinson, Effective Study
PARROT System for Textbook Studying

Preview
Previewing involves looking over the entire reading assignment with the purpose of familiarizing yourself with the concepts that will be covered. Previewing involves skimming the major headings, illustrations, charts, figures, and anything else that stands out from the text. If there is a summary, read it for the first time during the preview stage. This helps you prepare for what is to come and understand how concepts relate to one another. As you preview, in your mind, begin to . . .

Attend
As you preview the material and prepare to read, it is important to formulate questions based on the topics and sub-headings. Ask yourself if anything is familiar, hence activating your prior knowledge on the subject. Ask yourself what you can expect to learn or what you need to find out. This creates a purpose for you to begin reading . . .

Read
As you begin to read, do not attempt to read a chapter all the way through in one sitting without stopping. Instead, you read a textbook one section at a time, stopping at the end of each section to review . . .

Review
Reviewing does not mean word-for-word recitation of what you read. Review refers to the point at which you stop to check your comprehension by summarizing, aloud if you prefer, a brief overview of the material, preferably in your own words to help you make personal connections to the information. As you explain it to yourself, you should be taking note of how the information is organized and use this knowledge to . . .

Organize
As you complete each section, organize the information in a format that will help you better comprehend and study. This may involve creating an outline, developing study cards, constructing a concept map, highlighting key terms, margin notes, Cornell Notes, or another process that suits both your style and the level at which you need to recall the material. If you are preparing for a test, consider what level of knowledge will be required such as recognition, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, or evaluation (Bloom, 1964) and prepare your study materials accordingly.

Test
Finally, use your study materials to regularly teach yourself the information and test your knowledge. Are you able to define concepts, answer questions, or solve problems? Use your study cards or Cornell Notes, attend a study group, or practice applying the knowledge to new examples. Remember, you don’t know what you know until you actually test yourself.

*PARROT Textbook Study System (McLay, 2004)