

# Strategies for Reading Textbooks <http://www.educationcorner.com>

Reading textbooks may not be fun, but it is a necessary tool for students. Throughout middle school, high school and college, textbooks will be a big part of your reading. Understanding how to read and use them effectively is key to academic success.

## Before You Read

Textbooks can be boring, tedious, and full of detail. Jumping right in to a textbook without having a general idea of the central themes and topics can make textbook reading that much more challenging. We learn best when we move from general to specific. Previewing and developing a big picture of a text before reading will enable you to better identify what's important as you read and make it possible for you to retain the detail.

**Preview.** The steps below will help you preview a text and enhance your comprehension and retention.

- Review all chapter headings and subheadings.
- Glance over any pictures, charts or graphs in the section you'll be reading.
- Read any bold or italicized words and make sure you understand them.
- Read the chapter summary.
- Review any end of chapter questions.

**Question.** Developing a set of questions you want to answer before you start reading a text provides direction and focus as you read the text. Once you've previewed the text, make a list of questions you want to find answers to as you read. How do you do this? Easy. While you're previewing the text, turn each heading and subheading into a question. For example, if the heading is "Root causes of the American civil war," then your question may be "What were the root causes that lead to the American civil war?"

## While You Read

The following strategies will help you maximize your comprehension and retain information while reading textbooks.

**Reflect.** From reviewing chapter headings, subheadings, bold or italicized words, ask yourself what you've already learned. Now as you read:

- Answer the questions you developed while previewing the text.
- Try and predict the answers to the questions and find out if your predictions are correct.
- Read aloud. Reading aloud improves comprehension and retention of information.
- Develop a picture in your mind of the concepts presented. Visualizing information, concepts or material presented make it much easier to remember.

**Highlight.** As you read through your text, mark important passages that support central themes and concepts using sticky notes. Be selective. If you're highlighting more than 20% of a passage you're not being selective enough.

## After You Read

What you do after you read a text, can be almost as beneficial to learning and retention, as reading the text itself.

**Recount.** Once you've finished reading a text or passage, sit down with someone else and tell them what you read and what you learned from the text. Explaining aloud what you've learned from reading is arguably the most effective way to promote mastery of material and improve retention. Joining a study group is a great way to have the opportunity to share with others what you've learned from your reading.

**Review.** Review. And then review again! This will move the information from short-term to long-term memory. Each week spend about 10 minutes reviewing your notes and the highlighted parts of your text. Reviewing will make sure you're prepared when test time arrives.

# When Textbook Reading is Challenging

Textbook reading is typically more difficult than other forms of reading, but sometimes it's downright challenging. If you're faced with reading a challenging textbook, we recommend the following:

- **Read aloud.** Reading aloud improves reading comprehension and retention of information. Reading aloud allows you to hear what you're reading which enables the brain to process the information more effectively and remember what it heard.
- **Change positions.** Reading passages from textbooks gets tedious and boring really fast. Being stuck in the same position the entire time you read only adds to the monotony. Try reading standing up for a while, or change positions every once in a while.
- **Read the text again.** Each time you read a text again you'll pick up something new, retain more information and find it easier to understand. It's not uncommon to read the same passage from a textbook several times before you're able to fully understand and retain the information.
- **Search for key words.** Read sentences removing the adjectives and adverbs. This will cut to the meat of the sentence and help you identify what's being said and what's really important for you to know.
- **Jump around in the text.** Sometimes it's beneficial to skip around and read different parts of a chapter or section in a textbook. For example, jumping to the end of the chapter and reading the chapter summary, before reading the chapter, can greatly enhance focus, direction and understanding as you go back and read the actual chapter.
- **Mark it.** If you come across a passage or section of the text that you just don't understand, use a sticky note in the margin of your book to mark the passage. When you're done reading your text, you'll have several marks throughout the chapter. Once you get back to class, you'll know what questions to ask your teacher or professor.
- **Take a break.** If you're just not making headway with the text you're reading, take a break, regroup and come back to tackle it later with a fresh pair of eyes.
- **Turn to the web.** When all else fails, "Google" it. The web is a plethora of information. And these days there are websites that address, and lend understanding, to just about every topic or subject.

## Things to Consider...

Here are a few more things to consider when reading textbooks.

### What to Read

Every teacher is different. Some weight their tests and quizzes heavily on what's found in the textbook, while others rely almost entirely on their lectures. At the beginning of the year try and find out if exams will be based primarily on information obtained through in-class lectures or from reading the text book. This will help you know where to focus your time.

### Where to Study

Finding a peaceful, comfortable location, away from distractions, where you can focus, is essential to reading textbooks effectively. Learn more about finding a good study location.

### When to Read

When you read is just as important, if not more important, than where you read. Reading textbooks can be tedious and boring. The last thing you want to do is read when you're fatigued, tired or it's late at night. Reading textbooks requires that you're alert and attentive. We recommend reading for about 30 to 45 minutes at a time then taking a short break to reinvigorate your mind and body.

### How to Retain It

The best way to retain information from text books is to (1) read aloud and (2) discuss what you've read with other people. Reciting text information moves it from your short-term to long-term memory and ensures subject mastery.