

Effective Reading

It's a new school year. You're excited about your classes. You've got terrific instructors. You're eager to learn. You want to do well, but after the first week of classes, you're beginning to panic about what seems like an insurmountable task. How are you going to get through all this reading? It's all new material and much of it is tough to understand. You want to learn it, and you've got to remember it, but by 10:30 each night you find yourself drifting off into space while reading. Nothing is sinking in.



What can you do?

Well, there are a couple of things you can do to make the time you spend reading more effective learning time. Reading a textbook is quite different from the reading you do for recreation. It requires a different approach and a different mindset. The suggestions listed below are recommended for all your study reading. Study reading is just a name we'll give to any reading when your purpose is to learn and remember material.

Survey each chapter before you begin your study reading. What does "survey" mean here?



Very simply it means that you get a glimpse or preview of the chapter before you sit down to some serious reading. A survey of the chapter includes reading the objectives or goals, noting the charts, illustrations, and photographs along with their accompanying captions, and reading the summary and questions at the end of the chapter. This exercise prepares you for reading by providing you with some background information.

The survey may help you discover that you already know quite a bit about the topic, or you may discover that most of the information is new and that you have lots of questions. Formulate some of those questions and read to find the answers. When you have a definite purpose for reading, when you are on a quest for information, you will tend to stay more involved in the reading.

After surveying the chapter, you may want to divide the chapter into manageable sections. That is, rather than reading a fifty page chapter at one sitting, you may decide to read the chapter in two sessions. After reading the first section, spend a few minutes and think about what you've read. Try to summarize, in your own words, the most important ideas from that section. You may want to jot this summary down in your reading notes, or you may simply do it as a mental exercise.

Whichever option you choose, you are reinforcing, rehearsing as it were, what you have just read. The information is more likely to stay with you. If you do this just after you read a section and right before you go on to the next section, you are increasing your chances of learning and remembering the material. Don't expect after one reading that you will learn to retain the information you need to know. Learning takes place over time. Occasionally you may want to skim chapters you have read to prepare yourself for reading subsequent chapters.

Always read with a pencil in your hand. Jot down questions, responses to the author's statements, and important vocabulary words. Because reading in its best form is "thinking," it requires that you become involved in a conversation of sorts with the author of the text. You know how easy it is to appear to be listening to someone when in fact you're really not listening at all. Your mind is somewhere else although you're looking directly at the speaker. Well, it can happen in reading, too.



Lots of times we "forget" what we read or we don't understand what we read when it's more a matter of our not really reading at all. Our eyes are simply traveling across a page of print, and our mind is not engaged in the process. During those times, we're not making an effort to "listen" to the author nor are we reading thoughtfully. Get in the habit of reading with a pencil in your hand and using it because it will help you stay more involved with your reading. Another plus is that when you reread, you will have a record of your thoughts, questions and reactions to the material. This personal record should shorten the amount of time you spend rereading.

Don't mistake reading with a pencil as the equivalent of highlighting what you read with one of those wonderfully fluorescent marking pens. It's difficult to write your ideas in the margins with a broad-tipped felt marker. Highlighters have their advantages, but students tend to overuse them, especially if they use them during the first reading. On your first reading of new and unfamiliar material, everything seems important. Highlighters should be used selectively.

Use what you've got. Most textbooks written today are designed with the student in mind. Take a good look at all of your textbooks. Note the wide margins (for your notes and

comments), glossaries, chapter summaries, chapter overviews, or objectives. Take advantage of these features. Textbooks are essentially tools. Make use of them.

Get rid of the misconception that the bookseller who buys back textbooks at the end of the term will give you more for a clean text. They won't. If the going rate on a used biology text is \$30.00, you'll get \$30.00; it doesn't matter that the book cost you \$160.00 new. It won't matter a bit that there isn't a mark in it.



A clean textbook is the sign of a student who believes that learning takes place by osmosis. This is the student who believes that if he simply presses the book against his forehead, the information contained within its covers somehow seeps into his brain.