

**TOPIC**

# *Textbook Strategies*

Helping students **PREPARE, ADVANCE** and **EXCEL.**

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**CAMPUSES**

**Flanagan**, Room 3620  
(above cafeteria)  
401-333-7440

**Knight**, Room 3540  
(third floor, library)  
401-825-1170

**Liston**, Room 2236  
(second floor, next to library)  
401-455-6116

**Newport**, Room 251 and 252  
(within library)  
401-851-1701

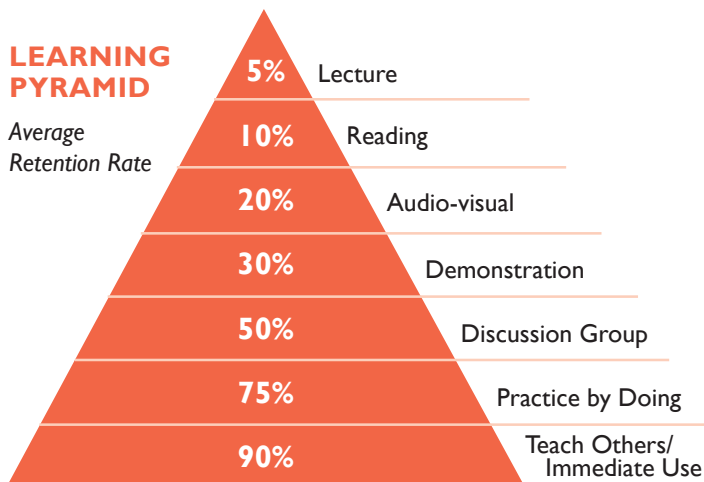
## Preparing your reading environment

Successful students prepare for reading by:

- sitting up, with a good light, at a desk or table.
- keeping background noise to a minimum. Eliminate loud music, screaming kids, talking roommates, television, phones or Internet.
- having paper and pen within reach.
- using a systematic approach to textbook reading.
- breaking up long reading assignments into manageable chunks of time – 45 minutes to an hour at a time. Take a break and return to reading the next section of the chapter.



Many people think of reading as a simple, passive process that involves reading words in a line and internalizing their meanings one at a time. But reading is actually a very complex process that requires a great deal of active participation on the part of the reader. The Learning Pyramid graphic on Page 2 demonstrates that the retention of information from reading is only 10 percent. To maximize their retention of a reading assignment, students need to determine what the purpose of the reading assignment is and employ various strategies to improve their retention rate.



**TIP:**

The Learning Pyramid shows us that the greatest methods of learning retention are at the base of the pyramid. This is achieved through discussion groups, practice-by-doing activities, sharing ideas and teaching others.

It is important for students to recognize that college reading requires much more than just reading over the assigned pages once, hoping to remember the material. Students need to carefully analyze the information being presented, make sure they understand what they read and recompose the material in their heads and notes in language they understand and will recall later.

### Tips for understanding your textbook

Students should purchase all required textbooks prior to the start of class. Waiting even a few days to purchase books can adversely set students behind in their class assignments. Before their first class meeting, students should review the textbook using the following suggestions.

**Look in the front**

- Read and think about the table of contents. This shows the overall organization of the course and helps a student identify what’s important.
- Glance over any preface or foreword to get an idea of the book’s purpose.
- Consider the title. This is often a significant statement about the book’s “slant.” Does it reveal any information about the author?
- Read the preface for helpful tips on how to use the text.
- Look for a publisher’s Web page for online resources such as quizzes, videos and study guides.

**Look in the back**

1. Glance at the index. The index:

- is a listing of the subjects and pages where they can be found.
- allows students to determine the percentage of known vs. unknown words that can provide an idea of how difficult the text will be for them.
- helps a student determine with great precision what the course is going to cover.
- allows for easy look-up of specific items of interest.
- can be used as a review for tests. Students can easily look up unfamiliar items because the page number is given.

2. Locate the glossary to see a list of words and their definitions.

- A main concern of many courses is to teach the vocabulary of the subject. This is a vital section; it is not something to be ignored.
- Create a tab for easy referral to the glossary to study and learn words during the term.

3. Determine if other useful information (*e.g., disc, student Web sites, etc.*) exists in the back of the book prior to needing them. Know that these study aids are there.

**Determine how a typical chapter is constructed**

All textbook chapters will be put together the same way. If one chapter has a summary and chapter questions, they all will.

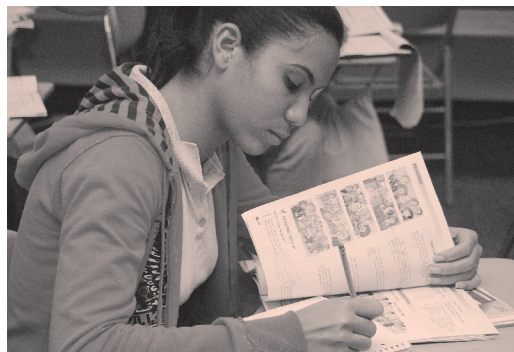
Students should use a textbook-specific reading strategy, such as PARROT (*See following section.*) Systematic reading strategies can be employed to help students retain more information from reading assignments. Just like being an active listener will improve a student’s note-taking, becoming an active reader will increase the student’s reading comprehension and retention. Students should be prepared for reading by having the tools and resources available to make the most of their reading time.

Good learners understand that reading a textbook effectively requires that the student approach textbook reading with a strategy to get the most information and retention of information from their reading experience. An active reader is engaged mentally, intellectually and physically in the task of reading. Read in an area with few distractions. Turn off electronic devices. Be engaged and open to reading – approach your reading assignments with a positive attitude.

Use your syllabus to determine what reading assignments are due each week in class and try to complete the reading assignment prior to the lecture. Even if you don't understand what you read, you will have exposure to the reading material before class, and you may then use your class time to get clarification on the material you did not understand.

Students should continue to review their reading assignments and previous reading assignments throughout the week and semester so that the material remains fresh in their mind. This should be done every week, not just exam week! An easy way to review previous chapters is to take the chapter quiz or use your notes and questions to review the material. This weekly review may help to alleviate the stress students may feel during an exam period.

Reading your textbook is important and is different than reading for pleasure. You may wish to use a reading system to help you break down complex material and retain the information effectively. Below are two different reading systems: PARROT and SQ3R. It doesn't matter which system you choose to use, what matters is that you get the most from the time and effort you put into your reading.



## PARROT system for textbook studying

**Preview:** This involves looking over the entire reading assignment with the purpose of becoming familiar with the concepts that will be covered. Previewing involves skimming (*see Page 4*) 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 students prepare for what is to come and understand how concepts relate to one another.

**Ask and activate:** While previewing the material and preparing to read, it is important to formulate questions based on the topics and subheadings. Student should ask themselves whether anything is familiar, hence activating any prior knowledge on the subject, and what they can expect to learn or what they need to find out.

**Read:** Do not attempt to read a chapter all the way through in one sitting without stopping. Instead, read a textbook one section at a time, stopping at the end of each section to use the next process. Plan to read for approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Take a 10- to 15-minute break before continuing for another 45 minutes. Do not read with a pen or highlighter. Don't take notes on the first reading, because everything seems important the first time you read it. There is a tendency to over-highlight to take notes on information that is not important.

**Recite:** Reciting does not mean word-for-word recitation of what is read. "Recite" refers to the point at which readers stop to check their comprehension by reciting, aloud if possible, a summary of the material, preferably in their own words to help them make personal connections to the information. By reciting or explaining to themselves, students should be taking note of how the information is organized.

**Organize:** At the end of each section, students should organize the information in a format that will help them better comprehend and study. This may involve creating an outline, developing study cards, constructing a concept map, taking Cornell notes (*see separate Note-taking handout*), or another process that suits students' learning styles and the level at which they need to recall the material. Students preparing for a test should consider what

### TIP:

Remember the PARROT system:

**P**review

**A**sk and Activate

**R**ead

**R**ecite

**O**rganize

**T**est

### TIP:

Take frequent breaks from reading. Break long chapters into sections. Outline or create flashcards for each section before moving on to new material.

level of knowledge will be required such as recognition, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis or evaluation (*Bloom, 1964*), and prepare their study materials accordingly.

**Test:** Finally, students should use their study materials to regularly teach themselves the information and test their knowledge. Students must be able to define concepts, answer questions or solve problems. Use study cards or visit the textbook Web site, attend a study group or practice applying the knowledge to new examples. Remember, people don't know what they know until they actually test themselves.

(*PARROT textbook study system, McLay, 2004*)

## SQ3R – Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review

**Survey** the material before reading it! Quickly look over the content of the reading assignment or chapter. Look at the chapter headings, illustrations, photographs or charts. Surveying the reading assignment first also allows the reader to determine if he/she is able to complete the reading within 45 minutes to an hour, or if the reading assignment is too long and needs to be broken down into smaller segments.

Asking **questions** allow the reader to find the main points of the reading assignment. When you are surveying the reading assignment you will start to identify questions. Turn paragraph headings and graphics into questions. Identify key vocabulary that is either bolded or in italics. Also, ask yourself what is this chapter about and how is this material related to the class lecture?

**Read** the material. Read for short chunks of time – anywhere from 45 minutes to 1 1/2 hours. While you are reading, look for answers to the questions identified in the previous step. Often students will overwhelm their minds by reading for too long – your brain becomes saturated and is unable to absorb new information. If you have thoughts such as, “I can't remember what I just read,” you read for too long!

**Recite** the material that you just read using your own words. You do not need to remember everything! The objective is to get the reader to say out loud as much as the reader can remember. Using your own words will help the reader to remember the information. Try to remember the questions you identified and what the answers are without looking at the text.

**Review** how well you remember the material you have read by answering the questions you identified prior to reading the chapter, completing chapter quiz questions and other textbook activities. Students may also find online resources from the textbook webpage that may have review activities such as chapter quizzes, videos, demonstrations, study guides and other resources.

## Note-taking for reading

- **Less is more!** Restrict an impulse to highlight or underline passages in the textbook. Students should not be taking notes on more than 25 percent of a page. Highlight only key passages, concepts, and terms.
- **Vary the color** of highlighter or ink to visibly separate information on the page.
- **Create flashcards** using index cards to review key concepts from the text.
- **Create an outline** of the material learned after reading a chapter or section of the text to assist with studying.
- **Jot notes in the margin** of the text or a notebook indicating passages needing review or explanation from the instructor.
- **Talk with the instructor** for help understanding the textbook assignments.
- **Translate difficult material** into your own words.
- **Answer the questions** at the end of the chapter.

## Reading myths

### Myth 1: I have to read every word

Many of the words used in writing grammatically correct sentences actually convey no meaning. If, in reading, students exert as much effort in conceptualizing the meaningless words as they do important ones, they limit not only their reading speed, but their comprehension as well.

### Myth 2: Reading once is enough

Many college students think that something must be wrong with their brain power if they must read a textbook chapter more than once. For most students, in most subjects, reading once is not enough. Use PARROT to help break your reading assignments into “manageable chunks.” This systematic approach builds in preview, reading and review. Also, students may want to select one day a week to review previous chapters throughout the semester as a means of reviewing for exams and quizzes.

**Good reading is selective reading.** It involves selecting those sections that are relevant to a student’s purpose in reading. Rather than automatically rereading, students should take a few seconds to quiz themselves on the material they just read and then review those sections that are still unclear or confusing.

The most effective way of spending each study hour is to devote as little time as possible to reading and as much time as possible to self-testing, reviewing, organizing and relating the concepts and facts, mastering the technical terms, formulas, etc., and thinking of applications of the concepts. In short, students should spend their time learning ideas, not painfully processing words visually.

## Steps to follow in skimming for the main ideas

First, read the title of the chapter or section carefully. Determine what clues it gives as to what the selection is about. Watch for key words like “cause,” “result,” or “effects,” and do not overlook signal words such as those suggesting controversy (e.g., “versus,” “pro and con.”) These indicate that the author is planning to present both sides of an argument.

Look carefully at the headings and other organizational clues. These provide tips to the main points that the author wants students to learn. Do not overlook boldface headings and titles because they are the obvious clues to the most important ideas. Students who concentrate on the details and ignore the main ideas will have much more difficulty retaining the information read.

**Remember that authors of college textbooks want students to recognize the important concepts.**

**They use:**

1. major headings and subheadings to convey major points.
2. italicized words and phrases so that crucial new terms and definitions will stand out.
3. lists of points set off by numbers or paragraphs that begin with the phrases such as “the three most important factors...” etc.
4. redundancy or repetition. By stating and restating the facts and ideas, the author ensures that students will be exposed in different ways to the concepts he or she thinks are the most crucial to understand. The author hopes that students will absorb the idea on at least one of these exposures. Therefore, it is vital that students recognize when an important concept is being restated in slightly different words and when they have completely mastered the idea.

(Adapted from © Academic Skills Center, Dartmouth College, 2001)

### TIP:

Resist the urge to read or take notes on information you already know.