

Improving Textbook Reading and Marking Strategies

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SQ4R – Six Strategies for Reading Textbooks More Effectively

SQ4R stands for Survey, Question, Read, Record, Recite, and Review (see detailed

A little on reading purpose:

Sometimes, you may just need an overview of the text material before attending a lecture; other times, you may need to really learn all the main points and terms in the chapter. At still other times, you may need to read after the lecture, focusing only on the material the instructor covered in class. Your purpose for reading is vitally important and is determined by both your instructor's approach to teaching and testing as well as your own learning style. That is the primary reason to have SQ4R at your disposal, so you can adapt to the situation and your style. Figuring out how and when to attack a text in each new course is a key to success. You can get insights on the role the text will play in the course from looking at the course syllabus, talking to former students, asking a tutor, asking the instructor, and looking at quizzes and exams. (It is important to realize that the role of the text might be also be different for students with different learning styles and background knowledge.)

A little on using the chapter and text features:

There are often chapter features, like chapter objectives, a summary by section, and review questions, which can be very useful in learning the textbook material. It can be useful to use those features in unconventional ways. For instance, you might want to get the "big picture" by looking at the summary, reading the objectives, or looking at the table of contents before reading the whole chapter. Or, you may want to read the summary portion for a particular section before and after reading that section. For "feedback", you may want to read one section of the text and then try to answer the review question(s) (out loud or in writing) related to that one section before going on. Or you could accomplish the same task by turning the objective for that section into a question and trying to answer it before going on. So, think about how you can use the text and chapter features (and, also the textbook Website, if there is one) to promote the rehearsal/feedback and retrieval of the textbook information.

Textbook Marking

Textbook marking refers to anything you do on or near the text once you have identified something as being important to learn. It can be underlining, highlighting, coding (like boxing a technical term and its definition), simple labels (like "ex" and "def"), summarizing, outlining, charting, etc. Marking is vital because it gets you actively involved in selecting and organizing the information and gets you writing to start the rehearsal process.

Students frequently ask me about their highlighting: "Am I doing too much or too little, how can I know what's important to highlight?" etc. TOUGH QUESTIONS!

I ask them if they have thought what their purpose is for marking the text and how they would know if what they are doing works for that purpose.

Then, I say something like: "Of course, what you mark depends a lot on what role the book plays in the course and on your learning style". That comment always brings a sour look, one that usually tells me that they either think: a) I'm being a smart-alec, b) this is going to be too much work, or c) I don't have a clue but don't want to admit it.

Then, I really tick them off by saying that I think highlighting alone is pretty close to worthless!

Let me explain some of this. The purpose issue we have covered earlier. What you select has to be related to your best guess of what will be important to YOU in EACH class. So, there can't be a simple answer!

Sure, we can talk about main ideas and patterns of organization. These are the basics of reading comprehension. Learning to identify them would be very useful in all reading (and listening) situations.

Let's go back to highlighting. Why do you highlight something? Because it's important, right? Right, highlighting tells you at some later point that the information was important. What it doesn't tell you is WHY OR WHAT MAKES that piece of information was important! This is a key - it is so much more valuable, both as you are reading and later, to indicate what made this worth marking. For example: did you find the definition of episodic memory? If so, don't just highlight it, write "def. of episodic memory" next to it. Or code it, along with all your other definitions, in green highlighter. Or box the term and underline the definition with a regular pen. Or write the term and the definition in the margin. All of these are more active strategies that identify what made the piece of information important to learn. You are selecting and organizing. It also makes it easier to do feedback and to check retrieval later on (just turn the label into a question and ask yourself: What is the definition of episodic memory?)

For many students, the greatest value cou (e w)0.9 T3 (i)1 Is (ue c)-1sP-3 (t)-3 oew vdowD1 (r)-3 (et)2T

