HOW TO READ A TEXTBOOK CHAPTER

Textbook reading, often referred to as study reading, intensive or thorough reading, is unlike casual pleasure reading. It involves an alert, active mind thoughtfully responding to information. You must know what you are reading for; you must be able to recognize the essential ideas, organize them and relate them to what has gone before. More important, you must be able to relate new ideas to knowledge and experience you have already gained. And most crucial beyond comprehension, you are expected to remember the essential ideas and supporting material.

To do this a textbook study system is necessary. The following recommended textbook study system has borrowed from the best and most practical aspects of many study systems. If followed persistently, it will bring most gratifying rewards. At first, it may seem to require considerable time. But after a short while, not only will you be able to study read faster but – and most important – your comprehension and memory will improve such that distributed practice (periodic reviews) will involve less and less effort and time. My textbook study system involves:

- Survey and question (ask general questions)
- Study, read and question (ask specific questions as well)
- Recite and self-question
- Reflect and question
- Record
- Review and self question

Survey & question (referred to as pre-reading, preview or overview) Why?

- to develop curiosity, interest, motivation
- to develop an active mental set for attention-concentration
• to get a highlight tour of the chapter, permitting you to see it whole
• to develop the warm-up for the material, softening it for intensive reading
• to determine the central concern and crystallize your purpose
• to judge the difficulty level so that you can better judge what reading techniques and what rate to use when study reading the material
• to sample the writing style of the writer
• to read faster alter as the material is now somewhat familiar

The longer the chapter, the more time you should spend in surveying it.

How to survey

• Scrutinize the title. What do you suppose it means? What are the key terms and concepts? What do you already know about the subject? Turn title into a question to spur you on, searching for the answer.

• Read carefully and slowly the introductory paragraphs (those before the first bold heading)/ Identify the thesis (major controlling idea) as well as the purpose of the article. Note key terms and concepts. Keep THESIS foremost in your mind as you continue.

• Read all headings as these are the major ideas which support the THESIS and organize the structure of thoughts. In a well written chapter, the author does the organizing for you by way of headings and subheadings. These serve as the hangers for details as you study read later. If you do not have the organizational framework well in mind, it will be easier to get bogged down with details or, worse, just read for isolated details. Turn these headings into questions to
develop interest, concentration, a more significant purpose in reading, and to initiate an active search for answers.

- Relate headings, organizing them into a meaningful pattern as you proceed.

- Note all illustrations (pictures, maps, charts, graphs, tables). These are important aides to understanding and promote speed when study reading later as they compress much information. In many science books, a meaningful survey can be made just by carefully looking over the illustrations as every important concept is usually illustrated.

- Read summary paragraphs or conclusions carefully. Relate them to the title, thesis and heading you have just read.

- Review chapter-end questions (if any). These will help direct your reading to what the author thinks is important, thus checking your comprehension and selection of what is important in the chapter.

If this survey reveals that the material is familiar or that you know it well, then you can save time by giving it a quick review. You can spend more time on what is new and difficult instead.

**Study, read and question**

- Read in meaningful though units (not word by word) to a natural break or a manageable part, actively **searching** for answers to the heading turned into a question or topic sentence turned into a questions or any statement turned into a question.
• Ask more specific **questions** as you read. Engage in a continuous dialogue with the author. Adopt a healthy questioning skepticism about the information – questioning, wondering, anticipating, confirming or rejecting your thoughts as necessary. A questioning attitude results in a more determined attempt to read--search for the answer. The tension or disequilibrium evoked by questions will not subside until the question is answered. Also, questioning forces you to concentrate--to attend to the reading--as well as serve memory.

• **Read actively.** This means reading and thinking about what you read, associating it with what you already know, putting it in some general category in your mind, applying it, analyzing its parts as necessary, putting it together again (synthesizing), and evaluating it. Also draw inferences, think of implications, significances and consequences.

• **Read selectively.** Determine what is essential what is important and what the significant details are. Avoid getting lost in extensive explanatory and supporting details.

• **Visualize.** As your visual sense more easily and quickly serves comprehension and memory, visualize the information as you read developing a continuous movie in your mind.

• **Vary** your reading rate or speed depending on the familiarity, difficulty level and **purpose** of the material. Shift gears from slow to fast throughout the reading.

• Follow **directional words** that control the flow of thought.

• If the material is difficult, take it in smaller doses.
• Note key terms and concepts. Be sure you understand them. Think of concrete examples to illustrate them when possible. Say these words out loud a few times until they have a comfortable, familiar ring.

Recite and self-question

• After each paragraph ask your self what is the major idea? What is the author trying to tell me? What are the significant supporting facts? If nothing else, you must identify and understand this much.

Reflect and question

• Continue thinking about what you just read, associating it with what has gone before, what you already know. Draw inferences and think of implications, consequences and significances. Relate the major ideas to the thesis and title, and chain-relate or associate major ideas as they unfold so that you will have a meaningful whole and continuity of the material throughout the chapter.

Record (Paraphrase briefly)

• Paraphrase briefly the major idea and essential supporting data. Use any organized note-taking system which works for you. There are more dropouts at this point than at any other step along the way—despite the overwhelming evidence on the usefulness of this step.

Review and self-question

• Immediately after completing your notes on a chapter, return to the beginning of your notes and review them. You may make questions of your major headings and see if you can recall most of the supporting
explanatory data, you may re-read them several times, you may read them aloud, or you may have a friend ask you questions using your notes.

- This is the heart of learning: most of your time should be spent reviewing your notes as it is crucial to mastery and memory. This immediate review-recitation reinforces memory, fixes the material in your mind and forestalls forgetting.

- Periodically review-recite (space or distributed review or practice) your notes until the exam. This periodic review further forestalls forgetting, thus cutting down considerably the study time for an exam, as well as making cramming unnecessary.

Updated 5/5/02
Handout created by Evelyn Garabedian of the DVC Learning Center. Copyright 2003.