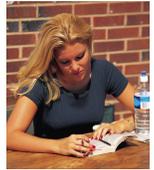


# Improving Essential College Skills

## TEXTBOOK STUDY-READING

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### INTRODUCTION

In college, besides listening to lectures, reading textbooks will be the other means by which you will need to learn and remember ideas and information.

College textbooks (compared to high school textbooks) are more challenging to read because in a ten-week quarter system, they generally require you to read more in less time (compared to a semester system), they have more facts and ideas per page, they are written at a higher level of complexity, they have more abstract ideas, and they introduce new, specialized terminology. College textbook reading requires more time, more effort, and more concentration than you may be used to.

Based upon the P2R (Preview, Read Actively, Review) study-reading system developed by Dianna Van Blerkom (*Orientation to College Learning*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Thomson/Wadsworth, 2004), try using a slightly modified system, 2P2R (Preview, Plan, Read Actively, Review).

#### A. WHEN YOU FIRST BEGIN TO READ

**Preview** the chapter to read to give you an overview of the chapter.

1. Read and think about what you know about the subject in the **title** (i.e., things you have previously learned or experienced which relate to the subject). This will start activating your memory so that you can make connections between what you already know and what you will be learning.
2. Read any list of terms or **chapter objectives**, if available at the beginning of the chapter. These objectives tell you what you need to be able to do after reading the chapter. These objectives can provide you with a focus for reading and a means to determine whether you have learned what is important in the chapter.
3. Read any **introductory paragraphs** at the beginning of the chapter to find out what the chapter will be about.
4. Read any **headings and subheadings** to provide you with an outline of the major topics and subtopics in the chapter.
5. Look at any **visual aids**--such as photographs, graphs or charts--and read their titles and any captions. Remember the Chinese proverb, "A picture's meaning can express ten thousand words."
6. Read any italicized or **boldfaced key words**. These are the important terms you will need to learn and use.
7. Read any **summary** or concluding **paragraphs** at the end of the chapter.

From this preview, you will have a good idea about the **subject, topics, basic organization of the information, main ideas, and key terms** for this chapter. The time spent previewing will enable you to **read faster, understand and remember the information better**.

#### B. WHEN YOU BEGIN TO READ AFTER YOUR PREVIEW

**Plan**. Decide on a **realistic** number of pages to read during your study session. Set an **achievable** reading goal for the session. The more pages you try to read in a session, the greater the likelihood of losing concentration and not understanding or remembering what you read.

**Read Actively**. Read with a highlighter in your hand. **Read** a section of the chapter (e.g., from subheading to subheading), **think** about what is important to mark in terms of main ideas and key details, **decide** what to highlight, then **mark** your chapter. Marking will help keep you **alert and involved** because you have to pick out main ideas and important details. This also means that, when reviewing, you **save time**

by not having to read the whole chapter again to re-identify the main ideas and key details; thus you will have more time to **focus** on learning and not re-identifying this information.

Read for **main ideas** in the form of topic sentences **and key supporting details**. Remember that paragraphs will have a topic (who or what the paragraph is about), details (the specific information about the topic in the paragraph), and the main idea (the general or key point about the topic presented in the paragraph) expressed as the topic sentence.

The topic sentence may be found at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a paragraph. The rest of the sentences will provide the details to support (pointing out reasons or causes or citing evidence in the form of facts or numerical data) or explain (describing, giving examples) the main idea. Some paragraphs may have not have topic sentences but have implied (suggested but not directly stated) main ideas which you have to figure out from the other sentences in the paragraph

**Look for common patterns of organization** as you are reading such as definition, listing or enumeration, chronological order, generalization, comparison, and cause-effect. Signal words and phrases can help you to identify these patterns. Organized information is much easier to learn and remember.

**Monitor your comprehension** so that you are aware of how well you understand what you read and can take steps, when necessary, to improve your understanding. Why continue to read when you don't understand what you have read? Do this by stopping at the end of each section (between headings or subheadings) and try to summarize the main ideas and important details. If you have difficulty, think about the reason for your difficulty—is it the vocabulary, is it in trying to identify the main ideas, or are you having concentration problems—and think about what you can do about it.

Being active in your approach to reading will help you to remember what you read. Other ways to **be active** as you read besides marking your text are to **draw diagrams or concept maps** (visual or pictorial representations of the main ideas and details), **and create tables, take notes,** and **write summaries.**

### C. AFTER YOU HAVE READ ACTIVELY

**Review.** Be active in how you review and as well in how you read. Reviewing by just reading your textbook chapter or your highlights over and over again is **not** a very effective or efficient method. By reviewing this way, you may experience the **“illusion of knowing”** (Myron Dembo). This is when you tell yourself after a test, “I can't believe I got this low grade; I studied so hard! I thought I really knew this stuff.” So the “illusion of knowing” is occurs when you think you know something when you really don't because you did not **test yourself** while studying to see if you understood and could recall the information. Reviewing by just reading and re-reading the chapter utilizes your visual sense. Try reciting and writing to utilize both your auditory and your tactile-kinesthetic senses as well. The **more** senses activated and engaged in the learning process, the **greater** the likelihood of recall.

To actively review, **recite or re-write from memory**, the points you highlighted in the text or have written in your notes or summaries. Even if not assigned, find and write out answers to the end-of-the-chapter review questions. Then, **recite or re-write from memory**, the answers you have written to the questions. Try creating and writing down questions (“who,” “what,” “where,” “when,” “why”, and “how” or essay test question words such as “define,” “describe,” “trace,” “compare,” etc.) based upon your highlighted information, your notes, your summaries, or your diagrams and concept maps. Then **recite from memory** the answers to your self-created questions.

### CONCLUSION

After reading this, you are probably thinking that this system involves “too much work” and that just reading the textbook is easier and less work. The question to ask yourself is “how much do I want to learn and remember from what I read?” and then decide.