

Textbook Reading Strategies

Reading a textbook let alone many textbooks can feel very daunting! How do I get through all of this material in one evening? How do I know what information is the stuff I should actually learn? This quick tips guide will hopefully point you in the right direction as you make the most of your reading session.

Make sure you have set yourself up for success before you begin reading. Eat a light meal, have some water, and exercise before you sit down to read. Make sure you are rested. Turn off the TV and put your phone away and on silent (or turn it off!). Tell folks not to bother you for a few hours. If at all possible, make the most of the time of day that you're most focused and awake. Morning person? Read in the morning if at all possible. Night owl? Read in the evening but make sure you get to sleep at a reasonable hour too.

Before you start reading, survey the entire reading assignment.

Look through the reading assignment. Get a feel for what topics will be discussed. Look at the bolded words, the diagrams, the definitions and captions in the margins. These are the main topics that the authors have already identified for you.

Review the table of contents or chapter goals at the beginning of the chapter.

Get a feel for what the reading will be about. Set the stage for your reading assignment. This will help you focus on the main concepts as the authors have already identified them for you. You can even use these headings to help you organize your notes.

Come up with a game plan of where you will start and how you will proceed.

You don't necessarily have to start at page one. You can get an overview of the entire reading assignment and then decide where you want to start. Do you already know chapter one pretty well? Then leave that for last and start with chapter two. Spend your energy on the information that is new to you. Leave the familiar information until the end. Or, vice versa. Quickly read through the information you're familiar with and then spend most of your time on the new information.

Start with the questions/quizzes at the end of the chapter.

If you're pressed for time, starting with these questions/quizzes and going back to find the answers is an efficient way to get the main concepts of the chapters without having to read through every single detail. If you can answer these questions, you likely have a good grasp on the material. After you've answered these questions, go back and read the text from start to finish to make sure you've got everything. You can use these questions to help you focus your notes too.

Don't be afraid to read the chapter out loud to yourself.

Reading a textbook is great but sometimes textbooks are wordy and dry and you might find it more helpful to read a definition or explanation out loud to yourself. Then you can talk it out with yourself and put it into your own words so you're more likely to remember it.

Take breaks and pace yourself.

Ever read a page and realize you have no idea what you just read? This is a sign you are overdue for a break. Make sure you take a 10 minute break every 30-45 minutes. Set a timer. Your brain needs

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breaks in order to process and store information but also to keep it fresh and focused. Use your break to re-fuel (get a snack, water), do some jumping jacks to get your blood pumping again (oxygen to your brain). Go to the washroom. Put in a load of laundry. Make your lunch for tomorrow. You can also use chapter breaks or page breaks as points at which to take a break. Read ten pages, then take a break. Finish the section on the respiratory system and then take a break. It's up to you.

Write in your textbook.

It's your property so don't worry about marking it up and making it work well for you. Highlight, write notes to yourself in the margins, circle or highlight things you don't understand, cross off items you've mastered. Use different colored pens for different concepts.

Highlight with a strategy.

Sometimes highlighting important information ends up backfiring as you suddenly have an entire page that's neon yellow. Think about the kind of information you want to highlight. Will you highlight all definitions you come across? Will you highlight all material having to do with a particular concept? Try to have a plan so you don't end up with a neon yellow chapter.

Mark the passages that you just don't understand, and come back to them later.

Don't get hung up on difficult concepts. Mark them, and come back to them. If you mark these spots and keep reading, you might come across other information that helps you explain these tough concepts. You also want to make sure you complete as much of the reading assignment as possible.

Read with a partner.

Make a meeting to read sections of the assignment with a partner. After each concept, take a moment to discuss the content of the reading. Ask each other questions. Talk through things you might not understand. Quiz each other.

Read an entire section or page before taking any notes.

Then go back and pick out the important concepts and write them down in your own words. This allows you to get an overview of the whole concept before trying to pick out the most important pieces.

Take notes using your own words.

Putting concepts into your own words, translating them into the way you think/talk, will help you understand and remember them. Don't copy the author's explanation word-for-word. Put the concept into your own words. Write it down.

Review your notes.

Reviewing your notes allows you to think again about the concepts you've learned. Repetition is key to having information stick in your brain. You cannot read something once and expect to understand it or retain it.

Draw pictures, create your own or copy diagrams from the book.

Making visual representations of concepts will help you understand them in different ways. Visual representations are also another way of inputting information into your brain. If you can experience information in multiple ways, it's more likely to stick in your brain.

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