

A GUIDE TO READING *TRADITIONAL* TEXTBOOKS IN A READING or DISCUSSION-BASED COURSE

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What do professors expect in classes such as history when they say “Read Chapter 5”?**

1. You will read and basically understand the material.
2. You will be able to identify what is most important to remember.
3. You will make notations in the textbook itself so you can find specific information quickly.
4. You will identify anything you find confusing, and you will ask the professor about it.

**In lecture-based courses, your professors may not expect you to follow steps 1-4 by reading chapters at this intensive level. For such courses, your goal is to gain an overview and become acquainted with the material. See #1 below.

What makes this kind of reading difficult?

- College textbooks often contain more information per page than high school textbooks.
- College textbooks are usually written at a higher reading level than high school texts.

How can I improve my concentration while I read so I remember the information later?

The following strategies will help improve your ability to understand the material, to focus while you read, and to find specific information later for class discussion or papers.

1. Plan ahead before you begin to read intensively.

- Before you begin reading, take about 15 minutes to look over the assigned reading.
- Use the “user-friendly” textbook aids that help you identify key points in the reading.

Look carefully at

- ♦ the introduction [including any introductory case study],
- ♦ chapter objectives or chapter outline,
- ♦ terms listed in **bold** or *italicized*,
- ♦ headings and subheadings,
- ♦ visual aids and their captions underneath [photos, diagrams, maps, charts, etc],
- ♦ chapter summary, and
- ♦ chapter questions.

This quick overview should give you some general background on the reading plus an idea of how the topics are organized. Before you start to read, you should have a sense of what you need to know when you finish reading the chapter.

2. Decide how much you should “bite off” at a time.

How much will you read before you stop to figure out what you have learned?

In texts with sections, read one section at a time. Then summarize what you have just read.

In other texts, without clear sections, try reading about 5 pages at a time.

Note: If you can’t summarize what you have just read, then reread!

3. Does the material sound familiar?

Ask yourself: *What do I already know about this material?*

It’s easier to remember if you can “hook” new information to what you already know.

4. IMPORTANT: To improve your concentration, raise a question and read to answer it!

For each section, ask at least one question and read to answer that question. You can often turn the title or heading into one or more questions and read to answer them.

Be flexible enough to add to or change your question(s) as you read if necessary.

If no question comes to mind, ask yourself, “*What do I need to know about this topic?*” or “*What is the point of this section?*” Then make sure you can answer when you are done!

5. Treat the textbook like a workbook so you have a record of what to remember.

Read with a pen in hand so you can make notations as you go.

Keep in mind that you are marking specific information you will want to find later.

- Underline phrases, not sentences, that answer your questions.
- **Remember, underlining is only a small part of good note taking. Make notations also!** Your notations should make certain items stand out clearly. Be creative!

For example:

] Underline or bracket particularly important pieces of information.

○ Circle specialized vocabulary, dates, names or other specific items.

??? Put question marks by confusing information so you can ask about it.

[Bracket long sections that seem really critical to review.

NO! “Talk to” the author by identifying points you agree or disagree with.

1,2,3... Number items that represent a list of points you want to note.

6. Push to the end of each section even if you find the material especially difficult.

You can always reread if necessary, but try to get an overview first.

- You should know the meaning of any words in a title or heading before you begin reading! Look up unfamiliar words in titles and headings right away.
- Once you begin reading, if you come across words you don’t know, circle them and push on. Your first goal is to get an overall understanding of the material. Then, when you have completed the section, return to the words you have identified and look them up. You should interrupt your reading to look up a word only if the unfamiliar word prevents you from a general understanding of the material. Remember, specialized terms are usually defined by the author in the reading itself.

7. Check on your understanding as you go!

After each section, test yourself by answering your questions or summarizing 3-4 points you need to remember. If you are unable to do so, you need to reread!

How can you make sure you remember what you have just read?

Try one of these ways:

- Return to each section and answer your questions.
- Summarize each section in your own words.
- Make sure you can explain each item in the Chapter Outline or Chapter Objectives.
- Answer any questions your professor has given you or questions at the chapter’s end.
- If **dates** seem important in a chapter, make a time line for the chapter and write in important events to remember. [*Tip:* Time lines usually work best when drawn vertically.]
- If **locations** seem important in a chapter, make sure you can locate important places on a map. You may also need to know how one location relates to another.

A note about highlighters:

This final review is an especially good time to use a highlighter. Highlight those items that you are having difficulty remembering so you know to review them more frequently and carefully.

What if you find that you are having trouble concentrating or remembering what you have read, or if you feel you are “spinning your wheels”?

Call the Learning & Advising Center at (215) 951-2730 and make an appointment to work with a professional tutor. One-on-one help is available!