



SQ3R Improving Reading Comprehension

Textbooks are often read in the same way that other books are read for pleasure - beginning with the first page of the chapter and reading to the end of the chapter, without stopping. While this method is fine for novels, it is not likely to result in the level of understanding and retention needed for most textbooks and the classes they are assigned to. SQ3R provides a different method of reading textbooks that will most likely enhance understanding and retention of material. It's not a quicker way to read a chapter in a textbook, but it is likely to reduce the amount of time you will need to spend studying the material immediately prior to the test. This result comes from more time being spent actually understanding the chapter while it is initially read. Study time then becomes deepening your understanding of the material.

Reading textbooks and comprehending their information is difficult. If you want further information about reading comprehension, review other sections of [Academic Support for Students](#). If you have been trying to improve your reading comprehension but the strategies you're trying just don't seem to be helping as much as you would like, please contact [Cook Counseling Center](#).

SQ3R is a five-step process:

- Survey
- Question
- Read
- Recite Review

[Survey](#)



This step helps you gather the information that is necessary to focus on the chapter and formulate questions for yourself as you read. It's not necessary to have answers to your questions at this step in the process - answers will come later.

Read the title

This helps your brain begin to focus on the topic of the chapter.

Read the introduction and/or summary

This orients you to how this chapter fits the author's purposes. It also provides you with an overview of the author's statement of the most important points.

Read each boldface heading and subheading

This helps you to create a framework for the chapter in your mind before you begin reading. This framework provides a structure for the thoughts and details to come.

Review any graphics

Charts, maps, diagrams, pictures, and other visual aids are there to make a point. Publishers will not include these items in textbooks unless they significantly add to the content of the text.

Review any reading aids in the chapter

This includes italics, chapter objectives, definitions, and study questions at the end of the chapter. These aids are there to help you sort, comprehend, and remember the material.

Question

Now that you have surveyed the entire chapter and built a framework for understanding, it is time to begin the reading process. This step and the next two, reading and reciting, are repeated over and over as you read the chapter.

Turn boldface headings into one or more questions. Write those questions on the left third of a piece of paper.

As you read this section, you will be looking for the answer to your questions. For example, if you are reading a book to help you improve your study skills and the heading is "Use a Regular Study Area," the questions you might ask are, "Why should I have a regular study area?" and "Where should my regular study area be located?"

Why is this step necessary?

When your mind is actively searching for answers to questions, it becomes engaged in the learning process. This will help you remember and understand the information.

Read



Reading each section fills in the information around the mental structures you have created by surveying the chapter and developing questions about each heading.

Read one section at a time

As you read each section, look for the answers to your questions and write them down in your own words on the right two-thirds of your piece of paper.

Add more questions, if necessary

A single question is probably adequate for a section that is only a few paragraphs long; however, for longer sections, you may find that you need to add a question or two.

Don't get bogged down with the details

Well-written textbooks often provide examples to further explain main ideas. As you read each section, try to separate the details from the main ideas. Use the details to help you understand the main ideas but don't expect yourself to memorize every detail provided in the chapter.

Recite



Reciting material as you go retrains your mind to concentrate and learn as you read. When you can answer your questions about the section that you're reading, move to the next section and repeat the question, read, recite process again. Use this for every section in the chapter

When do you recite?

At the end of each section.

How do you recite?

Look at the question(s) you wrote down before you read the section. Cover your answers with a piece of paper and see if you can answer the questions from memory.

What if you can't recall the answers to your questions?

Reread the section, or the part of the section, that has to do with that question.

Review



The review step helps to refine your mental organization of the material in the chapter and begin to build memory - we learn through repetition. This step provides another opportunity for repetition of the material and therefore will enhance your recall of the information.

How do you review?

Once you've finished reading the entire chapter, using the survey, question, read, and recite steps, go back over all of your questions. Cover the answers to the questions that you've written down and see if you can still recite them.

What if some of the answers have been forgotten?

Reread that section of the chapter to refresh your memory, recite the answer after you've written it down, and then continue your review process.

When to Use SQ3R



No technique is useful 100 percent of the time. Now that you've learned another study strategy, it is important to decide when to use it. Different study strategies work best in different situations.

When should you use SQ3R?

SQ3R is an excellent technique to use with textbooks that provide a lot of information and require you to learn the material in depth. Textbooks in many disciplines such as biology, psychology, and sociology fall into this category.

SQ3R is useful with many textbooks - what textbooks is it less likely to be useful for?

SQ3R is probably less useful with textbooks that focus on helping you solve problems, like with math textbooks. In this case, the main emphasis of reading the chapter is on helping you solve math equations. Focusing your energy on solving mathematical problems using the information in the chapter is probably a better use of your time.

SQ3R may be less useful for two other types of textbooks: beginning foreign language texts or texts for English class. The focus of beginning foreign language texts is often vocabulary, verb tense, and sentence construction. Books for English class may be novels, and the purpose of reading may be focused more on the "big picture," rather than on the content of a particular section or chapter.

Does it matter how the professor uses the textbook in class?

If your professor is reviewing a lot of material from the textbook during class lectures, it is probably well worth your time to read the chapters using the SQ3R method.

If your professor uses the textbook as a supplement or reference to class lectures, you will need to balance spending your study time solving problems, reviewing notes, or doing other class homework assignments to fill the time that would be spent using SQ3R.

Action Plan



Now that you've learned about SQ3R, the next step is to incorporate it into your study strategies. You may want to begin by selecting one class for which you will use the SQ3R method to read every chapter prior to your next test. Here are some additional strategies you may want to implement along with reading the chapter using this method:

- Plan ahead and start early. SQ3R takes time and is not a strategy that can be employed or used effectively the night before a test.
- Plan to read each chapter before it is discussed in class. Doing this will make the class lecture a review. It is also likely to help you to understand the material that is presented in class on a deeper level.
- Identify information in the chapter that you don't understand. Plan to talk with the professor after class or during office hours if you still don't understand the material after it is covered in class.

Write out your goals for using SQ3R over the next few weeks and stick to them.

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