Reading Strategies

Have you ever read a page in a text book, got to the bottom, and realized you couldn’t recall a thing? It’s so frustrating, right? But it happens to all of us. However, when you enter college there is no time to waste, and it is too frustrating to have to reread that darn page again. Want to know how to avoid spacing out and not retaining the information you need?

The first step is to recognize that when you were reading and not paying attention you were a passive reader. Passive reading barely involves you: the reader. Writers, who create textbooks, or novels, or collections of poetry, expect to build a relationship with their readers: that means they expect their readers to join in the conversation. To join in, you must become an active reader.

An active reader is someone who interacts with the material they are reading. They ask questions as they go along. They notice when they agree or disagree with certain ideas. They pay attention to how arguments are produced, or the language used, or when a textbook highlights important facts.

How does one become an active reader? There are many strategies.

- Annotate while you read. To annotate means to write in the margins of the textbook. By holding a simple ballpoint pen in your hand creates an active reader of you. Why? Because you are essentially having a conversation with the textbook. As you read, you jot down notes, you ask questions, and you can argue with the textbook. This is active reading. Finally, this process also helps in memory recall. You will remember your own specific notes.

- Highlight important information. Many students prefer to highlight. This can work, but it can also be a hindrance. When we highlight we use colored markers to pinpoint important information we think will aid us in understanding the text. However, many students overhighlight. They highlight entire paragraphs, or in some instances, entire pages. This actually does the opposite of the desired outcome. When you highlight everything, you cannot find the essential material you need. So, only highlight key terms and ideas. Use different colored highlighters so the material stands out. Highlighting will also help to become an active reader; however, as a long term learner and professor, I have found annotating to be a much stronger way to interact with textbooks.

- Always look up words you do not know. With smartphones, tablets, and other technologies available at our fingertips, looking up terms unknown to us is now easier than ever. By finding the definition of terms we not only understand their meanings, but we digest the material in a deeper and more meaningful way, which goes without saying, helps in memory recall.

- Preview textbooks. Note how the chapter is organized. Note which words are highlighted by boldface, italics, or underlined. Note titles and subtitles or headings and subheadings. Note introductions. Note any graphic aids. The authors of textbooks want you to know the information, so they try to make the information stand out and be easily recognizable as possible.

- Turn off competing stimuli: TV, Internet, cell phones, etc.

- Find a place to read that allows you to be the most alert. Do not read in bed or other such places that encourage sleepiness.
• Read when you are most alert. For instance, do not read first thing in the morning if it takes you time to wake up, or do not read late at night when you are falling asleep.

• Use the SQ3R Reading System. SQ3R has been a successful reading system for many years. It stands for survey, question, read, recite, and review.
  o **Survey:** it essentially meanings previewing the textbook. Become familiar with the chapter before reading it thoroughly. Skim over the headings and subheadings. Note the organization of the text. Pay attention to highlighted terms.
  o **Question:** Create questions about the material you are about to read. What is the text trying to teach you? Why are certain terms highlighted? Why is the textbook using headings and subheadings? This is being active. As you go along, keep asking questions.
  o **Read:** as you read try to answer the questions you have created. You are creating that conversation between yourself and the text. Take notes of your answers.
  o **Recite:** this is the step that can help the information reach your long term memory. When you finish a section, or after a major heading, look away from the text and try to remember the answers to your questions. You are testing yourself. If you cannot remember, go back and reread, and keep doing it until you do remember.
  o **Review:** after you have finished reading, go back through the text reading titles, headings, highlighted terms, etc. During this step recall your questions and answers. This will help solidify the material into your long term memory.
  o **All these steps create an active reader.**

• Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy, which is detailed in Chapter 15 “Critical Thinking” can also guide you into a deeper reading of the text. For another in-depth definition on Bloom’s Taxonomy click on this link: [http://enpub.fulton.asu.edu/mcneill/blooms.htm](http://enpub.fulton.asu.edu/mcneill/blooms.htm). Also, below you will find a reading exercise that shows how Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy works with reading.

• Finally, use the KWL strategy when reading:
  o Before reading ask yourself these two questions: what do I already **K**now on the topic or subject? What do I **W**ant to learn on the topic or subject?
  o After reading ask yourself this one question: what did I **L**earn?

*Did you know that whether you annotate/highlight your textbook or not, that you’ll get the same amount back when selling it to the bookstore? It’s true. As long as the text is still readable, they will give you the same amount whether you wrote in the margins or never opened the book. Many students will not write in their textbooks for fear of not being able to sell it back, but they are thinking of public schools. In elementary, middle, and high school, the schools own the books; therefore, they do not want you writing in them. But in college, you own the book. So annotate your textbook!*