

Study Tips

Keys to Success for BC3 Students
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this issue

Using the SQ4R Method P.1
Common Abbreviations P.2
For Further Reading P.3
Recap: The SQ4R Method P.4

MORE TIPS

-Plan on taking at least 5 minutes to read and review each page of reading.

-Schedule breaks during your reading time. Taking a 5 minute break after every 25 minutes of work or a 10 minute break after every 50 minutes of work increases productivity. Taking short breaks as you read your textbook will help you to stay alert.

-If you choose to highlight along with taking notes, be choosy. Most students highlight too much rather than too little. Experts recommend students highlight only 10-15% of the information in their textbooks.

-Date and title all of your notes. This will help you stay organized as you review for midterms and final exams.

-Consider taking notes on loose leaf paper and adding them to a 3-ring binder. This will allow you to store your notes along with your instructor's handouts.

Using the SQ4R Method to Read Your Textbooks

Did you know that reading your textbooks is just as critical to your success as a student as attending classes? Sure, in high school, many teachers cover all the material they expect you to know in their lectures. College is a different ballgame. College courses cover material about three times as fast as high school classes. That means that sometimes, instructors hold students accountable for material on the syllabus that isn't covered in class. Students are expected to read the assigned material on their own.

In addition, reading before class allows students to make the most out of lecture. One of our tutors, Martha Diamond, puts it like this: "Try to read assigned chapters for each course prior to the class. A student may glean better information from the instructors' comments or the PowerPoints if he/she does not have to also decipher numerous new vocabulary words or concepts."

Furthermore, many courses are discussion-based. This means that students are expected not only to read the material before class, but to understand and reflect on the material before class as well. In discussion-based classes, students discuss ideas and concepts from the text and lecture in order to deepen their understanding of the material. They may even be graded in part on their class participation.

Using the SQ4R Method to Read Your Textbooks

“Think about it; if text books weren’t important, instructors would never ask you to fork over your hard-earned cash to buy them.”

Think about it; if text books weren’t important, instructors would never ask you to fork over your hard-earned cash to buy them. Still, many students dread completing the assigned reading. It’s true—reading a textbook isn’t like reading a novel. Few students look forward to curling up on their couches with their textbook and a cup of tea. What many students don’t know, however, is that textbooks aren’t meant to be read in the same way as novels. They demand a different, very *active* kind of reading. Knowing how to read your textbook can make the difference between falling asleep at your desk and embarking on a journey to discover new worlds of information.

In this article, you will learn about the SQ4R strategy for reading textbooks. You may have heard of the SQ3R reading strategy. That strategy allows students to remember what they read and craft notes from which to study. By adding another step—reflecting—and committing to the SQ4R reading strategy, you can make this tried and true method a way to both comprehend **and** critically evaluate what you read. Here’s a quick guide to the SQ4R method:

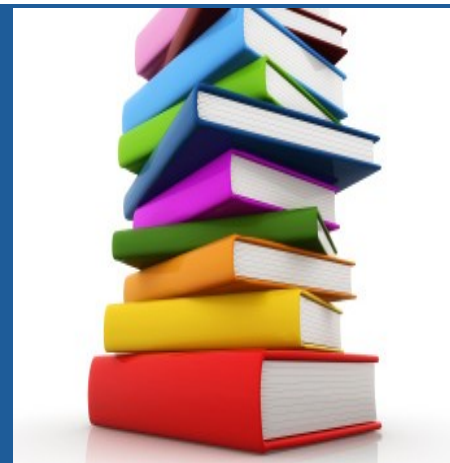
S-Survey the assigned chapter before beginning. As I mentioned earlier, you don’t want to read your textbook like a novel—cover to cover, word by word. While novels are broken up by long chapters and use very little formatting, textbooks chapters are broken up by headings and subheadings and are full of other visual clues that lead you to the important information.

As you survey your textbook, look for headings and subheadings as well as italic and boldface type. These visual elements are used by the book’s author

to highlight key concepts and terms. If a word is in bold print, chances are it’s important. If a concept receives its own header or subheader, it’s one you want to remember. Also look for graphs and charts that present information in visual form; they’re not just filler! Before concluding your survey, read the summary or conclusion to the chapter and the questions at the end of the chapter. Doing this will give you a clear idea of the main ideas in the chapter.

Q-Question as you read. As you encounter each heading or subheading in the text, turn it into a question. For example, in your psychology book, you see the header “William James and Functionalism.” You can turn that header into two questions “Who is (or was) William James?” and “What is Functionalism?”. Write these questions in your notebook.

R-Read for the answers to your questions and fill them in next to your questions; this is a strategy for taking good notes. For example, as you read the paragraphs about William James and Functionalism, you learn that William James lived from 1842-1910 and taught psychology at Harvard University. You also learn that he is the author of a famous psychology text—*Principles of Psychology*. Lastly, you learn that he approached the human mind through functionalism. Your book defines functionalism as “the study of how the human mind allows people to adapt to their surroundings.” Write down this definition as well as the information about William James next to each question. Try to answer the questions at the end of the chapter. After you do all of this, you will have a study guide that helps you to remember what you have read.



Common Abbreviations

Use these common abbreviations to make the most of your note-taking time:

- + for plus
- & for and
- - for minus
- # for number
- X for times
- > for greater than, larger
- < for less than, smaller
- w/ for with
- w/in for within
- → for leads to
- ← for comes from
- ↑ for increase
- ↓ for decrease
- Use numerals like “2” rather than spelling out numbers like “two”
- Use expressions like “3rd” rather than “third”
- Shorten words to abbreviate. For example, substitute “info” for “information”
- You can also shorten words by removing vowels. For example, you can shorten “point” to “pnt”.



Using the SQ4R Method (Continued)

R-Recite your questions and answers aloud to yourself. This repetition allows the information to enter your long-term memory. As you read, try to put each new concept or term into your own words. For example, you might reword the definition of functionalism to say this: “Functionalism studies how the brain helps humans adapt to the world around them”. If at any point you have trouble putting a concept into words, go back and re-read the section to clarify the information.

R-Reflect on the information you read. Because in college instructors want students to think critically about the information they learn, it is important that you don’t just remember what you read, but that you reflect on it as well. After reading and reciting, take some time to think about what you read. You may try to relate the information to your own life.

For example, in reflecting on functionalism, you may think about how you become hyper-aware of my surroundings when you travel somewhere new. Perhaps, you think, your mind is becoming aware of these new surroundings so that you can adapt to them.

You should also try to connect what you have read to material you have already covered in class. You may compare and contrast functionalism with other theories of human behavior, noting both its weaknesses and strengths. You may ask,

for example, how functionalism compares with modern theories like the biopsychological or cognitive perspective. You may ask yourself which theory is more effective at explaining human behavior. If you think that the biopsychological perspective is more persuasive, you will want to think about reasons to support your position. Reflecting in this manner will not only help you understand the material, it will also prepare you for essay tests and class discussions.

R-Review what you have read. You’ve made an excellent study guide; now use it! Studies show that reviewing your notes periodically is more effective than cramming for a test. Read and recite your notes weekly throughout the semester.

Using the SQ4R method will help you prepare for class and tests and ensure that what you learn is moved into your long-term memory where you can use it for years to come. Moreover, it will help you to study more efficiently so that you will still have time left at the end of the night to curl up with your favorite novel and that cup of tea.

Now that you know the SQ4R method, dust off those textbooks and get to work!

For Further Reading

Glickman, Adina. “Tips for Finding Major Points in Lectures.” *Teaching and Learning*. The Center for Teaching and Learning at Stanford University. http://web.stanford.edu/dept/CTL/Student/studyskills/taking_notes.pdf.

Glickman, Adina. “SQ3R.” *Teaching and Learning*. The Center for Teaching and Learning at Stanford University. <http://web.stanford.edu/dept/CTL/Student/studyskills/SQ3R.pdf>.

“Learning from Textbooks: A Guide to University Learning— Learning Services.” Learning Commons at the University of Guelph. <http://www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca/guides>.

“Reading a Textbook for True Understanding.” Academic Support and Advising, Cornell College. <http://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/get-assistance/studying/effective-studying/learning-textbooks>.



Recap: The SQ4R Method

Survey

Survey the assigned chapter. Look at headings, subheadings, bolded words, and italicized words to get a preview of the important information in the chapter.

Question

Turn each heading or subheading in the chapter into a **question**.

Read

Read for the answers to your questions and fill them in next to your questions.

Recite

Recite your questions and answers aloud to yourself.

Reflect

Reflect on the information you read.

Review

Review your reading notes regularly.

Tutoring @ BC3

