

How to Read a Textbook

1.) Prime the Brain (Before Reading)

- **Preview the structure**
 - Skim headings, subheadings, bold terms, visuals, charts, and summaries.
 - Look at end-of-chapter study questions, vocab lists, and objectives.
If there are no headings, read the first sentences of the paragraphs and the last paragraph.
- **Set a purpose**
 - Decide why you're reading: lecture prep, exam prep, assignment, or general understanding.
 - Write 2–3 guiding questions you want the reading to answer.
- **Activate prior knowledge**
 - Jot down what you already know about the topic.
 - Make predictions about what the section will cover.
- **Get mentally & physically ready**
 - Choose a time when you're alert.
 - Study in a quiet, focused space.
 - For e-textbooks: learn tools like bookmarks, hyperlinks, and search.

2.) While Reading (Active Reading)

- **Read in small chunks**
 - Work with 5–10 pages or one section at a time.
 - Engage in focused study sessions using tools such as Pomodoro Time
- **Ask & answer questions**
 - Turn the chapter headings into questions to identify the parts of the reading which answer that question
 - Write your own questions in the margin or notes as you go.
- **Paraphrase and take notes**
 - After finishing a section, paraphrase the main idea in your own words.
 - Use note systems such as Cornell notes to keep questions, summaries, and key points organized.

- Highlight sparingly, just key terms or phrases.
- **Identify and apply vocabulary**
 - Write down new words in your notes to go back to later.
 - Write the definition in your own words, this helps to commit the information to memory.
 - Note an example on how the definition is applied in context.
- **Check understanding**
 - Pause and summarize out loud what you just read.
 - Teach it back to yourself (Feynman Technique).
 - Connect the material to prior knowledge, other classes, or real-life examples.
- **Flag important spots**
 - Mark confusing or especially important sections to revisit later.
 - Skim the parts you are already familiar with and spend more time reading unfamiliar material.

3.) Reflection (After Reading)

- **Summarize & organize**
 - Write an outline, mind map, or diagram of what you remember *without looking*.
 - Compare with the text and fill in missing gaps.
- **Self-test & retrieval practice**
 - Answer end-of-chapter or practice questions.
 - Review the questions you wrote earlier. Can you answer them now?
 - Make flashcards for vocab, definitions, formulas, or key concepts.
- **Deepen understanding**
 - Explain concepts out loud as if teaching someone else.
 - Apply terms or concepts to problems, case studies, or examples.
- **Follow up on gaps**
 - If something's unclear, seek alternate explanations (videos, classmates, office hours).
- **Review consistently**
 - Revisit notes within 24 hours, then again weekly.
 - Use spaced repetition to strengthen memory instead of cramming.

4.) Digital Textbooks

- **Use built-in tools:** bookmark, highlight, and add notes; export highlights for review.

- **Stay focused:** read in full-screen mode, turn off notifications, and download sections for offline study.
- **Prevent screen fatigue:** use a larger device, adjust brightness, apply blue-light filters, and take 20–20–20 breaks.
- **Mix formats:** rewrite or sketch key points by hand to improve memory.
- **Stay organized:** back up annotations and use a note app to keep everything in one place.

5.) Tips for Annotating your Textbook

- Create a color code system (i.e. orange for definitions, purple for names/dates, etc.)
- Create a line system (i.e. straight line for key points, squiggly line for supporting points, etc.)
- Write your questions in the margins and use arrows to point to the answer once it is found.
- Identify vocabulary words and note them in a specific way that works for you, please note that the definition of the vocab word is not always. The sentence that is before or after the vocab word is used.
- Pay attention to key statements so that the entire paragraph isn't highlighted

6.) Additional Tips

- Read according to your learning style, auditory learners, may benefit by using a system, which reads the textbook out loud as they are reading it or reading it out loud to themselves, visual learners, may benefit by creating mind maps and paying special attention to diagrams, tactile learners, may benefit by moving their body while reading
- If you wrote a question in the margin that did not get answered, see a tutor or ask your professor for guidance.
- Use a reward system, such as giving yourself a snack for every number of pages read.