



Academic Resources

SQ3R: Textbook Study System

Inexperienced college students interpret the processes needed for learning in many different ways. For many students frantic reading of assigned textbook material just before a test is what they call “studying”. Another belief about “studying” is that it entails painfully memorizing main ideas and details and giving them back verbatim on exams. For others “studying” consists of using a method to gather information, organize it, and employ proven techniques to recite and review regularly to prepare for exams.

There is a method for attacking textbook assignments that works for many learners. It promotes an inquisitive, aggressive attitude towards learning and duplicates the mental processes of successful learners. This method is not a recent invention. Good students have used variations of it for over 50 years. Followed carefully and persistently, the routine in this method becomes habitual and easy. A skill increases; students acquire the more complex mental processes of learners who merely seem to read and remember. This textbook reading method is called **SQ3R**.

When college students do not use a system for reading textbooks, they have greater difficulty gathering and learning information.

SQ3R are the initials of the five important steps in this textbook reading method:

Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review

Step 1: Survey

The purpose of Surveying is to gain a quick overview of a chapter as a whole, its orderly development, and the relationships of main ideas to each other, **BEFORE READING**. To survey properly, **spend 1 to 2 minutes Surveying** in the following manner:

- A. **Fix the name of the chapter in your mind**, it is the essence of the main idea you are trying to get from the chapter.

- B. **Quickly read the introduction, outline, and objectives of a chapter.** They supply background information needed to recognize the purpose of the chapter. Secondly, they may state specifically the mode of development the author intends to follow. Both are important for faster reading speed and greater understanding of how ideas fit together.
- C. **Pay attention to the headings and sub-headings.** Well-written college textbooks are divided into sections: each headed by large, bold print. The title names the major topic to be presented and indicates that the author thinks this idea is very important. There may be several sub-headings under main headings. Sub-headings signal the important details in the chapter.
- D. **Look at other clues to important ideas.** This will help those who say, “I never know what is important or “I can’t tell main points from minor ones”. Authors indicate which points are important for you! Frequently, there are clues such as **bold print**, **italics**, numbered items, **color coded passages**, marginal notes, glossaries, outlines, questions, lists, charts, etc.
- E. **Read the summary** to see which ideas the author restates for special emphasis or what conclusions are drawn. **A summary contains only the main ideas in a chapter.**
- F. **Look over the words in the list of important terms** at the beginning or end of chapters. These are key ideas that you must understand in order to learn the material in the chapter.

Step 2: Question

Make questions out of headings and subheadings. For example, if the first heading in a chapter is “The Judiciary and the Constitutional Courts,” skim the details as a guide to the kinds of questions you can make. If the details provide definitions, form the questions, “What is the Judiciary” and “What are the Constitutional Courts? If the details explain characteristics of the relationship, a question could be “What are # (a number) characteristics of the relationship, between the Judicial and the Constitutional Courts?” Using abbreviations, the question may be condensed to:

“What are # chars. of rela. betwn. The Jud and Const. Courts?”

If, for example, there is a marginal note, “**The Need for Constitutional Courts,**” your question could be “**What is the need for Constitutional Courts?**”

Details always dictate the format of a question

Step 3: Read

While holding the questions clearly in mind, read the details to answer your question. Doing **this creates a clearly defined purpose for reading**, i.e., to find answers to questions. Positive results are greater concentration and it reduces the “Blank Mind Syndrome” where you cannot recall what you have read. Making questions and answers increases memory at test time.

Step 4: Recite

Reciting properly is **the important step to prevent forgetting**. Steps:

- A. **Look at a question** you have made.
- B. **Without looking, recite the answer aloud** to the question that you made. Answer fully as if you are lecturing a class. The key to success lies in reciting the answer **aloud** or writing it out. Another way to increase learning and recall is to write the answer down in the form of an outline, short paragraph, a chart, diagram, formula, etc.
- C. **Check your answer** by referring to your notes or the book.

Reciting is a guard against the risky assumption that an answer has been learned. Many students are satisfied with the **feeling** of understanding an answer and never get around to testing the state of their actual learning. Therefore, many students go into exams **feeling** they know the material but not knowing for certain if the material has been learned until they get the exam back.

Recitation requires mental activities far beyond those possible through “stroking the words with eyeballs” in a textbook: a technique so commonly used by students. Reciting promotes and speeds learning while rereading and rereading actually slows, impedes, and in some cases, prevents learning.

Step 5: Review

Very few people on this planet can remember the content of a whole chapter by reading it once. The **Question-Read-Recite** process divides a chapter into sections that can be assimilated separately, piece by piece. This allows the student to move at a pace they find best for learning. Regular review puts a chapter back together again. In review, you are answering the question that was made from the chapter title which, in our example, was “What is the Judiciary and how does it work”

Review means regular and frequent recitation of the material to be learned. This is an excellent check for learning and can eliminate entering an exam **feeling** that the material has been learned when it might not have been.

A natural objection to SQ3R is that it is slow. It **is** slower than simply reading but it is a solution to the problem characterized by the timeworn complaints of “I can’t remember what I just read” or after a poor grade is retuned on an exam, **“Darn, I thought I knew that.”**

Adapted with permission from Dennis Congo, Certified Supplemental Instruction Trainer, University of Central Florida

The SQ3R Study System

The SQ3R study system is an organized approach to your textbook learning. Students who use a study system read with greater comprehension and remember more over a period of time. What are the components of the SQ3R system?

The essential rules are condensed into the following formula involving the five specific steps of the study system:

1. Survey
2. Question
3. Read
4. Recite
5. Review

The first step is the SURVEY step. This is the process in which you get a quick overview of the material that will be covered in the article or chapter. The survey, which should not take more than 3 or 4 minutes, involves looking over the introductory and concluding paragraphs so that you know what the author intends to cover and reading the subheadings and captions to any pictures, charts or tables. Now you know what the reading selection is all about.

Step two is the QUESTION step. Here you are to take all of the boldface, subheadings in the text and turn them into questions. Write these questions down the right hand side of a sheet of notebook paper, leaving 4 to 5 lines between each question. This is called making advance organizers for the reasoning and gives you a purpose to help keep your mind on what you are doing.

Step three is READ. Now you read the chapter in order to find the answers to your questions. Write these answers on the notebook paper on the left side next to the question. As you do this you are creating a study guide for the chapter which will make your review easier. Make certain that you ask questions that are answered in the reading. If the question you me up with is not answered, change the question. As you become more proficient at this, you may start to notice an interesting phenomenon. The questions that you make up for study may be the same ones that your instructor makes up for the exam. In effect, you are predicting exam questions. The fourth step is RECITE. This is especially necessary in study reading. This is a step in which you say to yourself or to a partner, out loud, what it is you have just read. The more of your senses that you use while studying, the more likely you are to remember.

Step five is REVIEW. Take the study guide that you have developed for the chapter and look over it whenever possible. Don't wait until the last minute. The review can be done in small chunks of time as you wait between classes or have some time to spare while waiting for friends or lunch. Engaging in short periods of intensive concentration is a very efficient study method.

If you apply this formula--Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review--to your reading jobs that require concentration and learning, you will greatly increase your learning efficiency. The key to this and other study systems is repetition and comprehension monitoring. This method requires you to review the material several times and to determine, through the use of your study guide, what you do and do not understand prior to moving on. These processes will aid in your retention of the material.

Adapted from Penn State University

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