

Textbook Reading Skills

Things to do *before* reading:

1. **Make specific times to read assignments** for each course. Mentally commit yourself to these time periods to read about these subjects. This makes concentration easier.
2. **Recall what you already know** about the topic to be read.
3. **Bring an open mind to what you read.** You don't have to agree in order to understand what an author says.
4. **Intentionally state a reason to read** (e.g. "I want to find out about") **or create questions** out of titles, subheadings, italicized words, etc. and read to find the answers. Concentration and memory improve when there is a specific purpose for reading beyond the fact that something has been assigned.
5. **Divide a long chapter or assignment into pieces.** It is easier to concentrate if you focus on one piece at a time instead of trying to digest a large amount of material at once.
6. **Take 1-2 minutes to skim through a chapter before reading** to see how it is structured and where the author is going to take you. Look at the title, introduction, subheadings, and summary.



Things to do *while* reading:

1. **Read only when you are able to concentrate.** Monitor yourself by putting a check mark on a piece of paper whenever concentration wanders. This will help return your mind to the reading assignment. If you cannot concentrate, do something else for 5 or 10 minutes or study a different subject for awhile.
2. **As you read, take notes from the text.** Condense ideas using abbreviations, symbols, short phrases, and sketches. Avoid complete sentences.
3. **Use a specific format for organizing notes** from textbooks. The Cornell System for organizing notes involves drawing a line 1/3 from the left margin of notebook paper. Main ideas are recorded on the left side and details recorded on the right side.

Main	Details
○ Idea	
○ Main	Details
Idea	
○ Main	Details
Idea	
○ Main	Details
Idea	

- Another convenient note format is to **make a question from a main idea and place it on one side of a notecard**. Read to answer the question and put the answer on the other side. This reduces forgetting of what was just read and provides a fast and easy way to organize note for later learning.
- When you make notes, **use your own words** to record ideas. This will aid in learning and in later recall on tests.
- Change reading speed** according to the difficulty of the material and the purpose for reading. No single reading speed is effective for *all* types of reading material. Textbook reading should be done fairly slowly and deliberately compared to reading newspaper articles or novels. If you take good notes, you should not have to read a textbook chapter more than once.
- Read and study in locations free of visual and auditory distractions.**
- When concentration or understanding what is read is a problem in textbooks, **read aloud** as if explaining it to someone else.

Things to do *after* reading:

- In your spare time, **think about what you read**. **Discuss** information to be learned with others such as in a study group.
- Relate what you read to class lectures.**
- Look at main ideas or questions and recite aloud or write details and answers without looking**, as if you are taking a test. If you can recall answers completely and accurately from memory, you know that you know the material. If you cannot, you know immediately where you need to concentrate your study efforts.



What you do before and after reading is as important as what you do during reading when learning from textbooks. The ultimate objective of all textbook reading should be to understand what is read and assimilate it into your store of knowledge. That is, **the information has become a personal possession**. When this happens, the information has been learned.