

Counselling &
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North Vancouver Campus

Student Success
Workshops

Textbook Reading Strategies



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Textbook Reading Strategies

As a university student a great deal of your learning will be conducted on your own and will involve reading and learning material from academic textbooks. As a result, you will need to implement active reading strategies that help you effectively and efficiently read, understand, retain, and recall your textbook material. Active reading starts with conducting a thorough preview of your textbooks at the start of the term to become familiar with their features and overall content. The process of conducting a textbook preview is outlined below:

Previewing a Textbook

Previewing your textbooks is a very important part of the textbook reading processes and involves getting an overview of the content of the text before you begin reading the assigned chapters. Previewing makes you familiar with the text's organization, layout, special features and the author's objectives. To conduct a preview of your textbook, follow the steps below:

1. Look at the **title, author(s), & date of publication** of the text. The title will enlighten you as to the scope or orientation of the text, and the date of publication will tell how current the text material is.
2. Read the preface and the introduction to the student. The preface will usually tell you why the author wrote the book, what is presented in it, and for whom the book is intended. The introduction usually tells the reader how the book should be used and identifies the special features of the text.
3. Read the table of contents. The titles of units and chapters give you an overview of the book's contents in their order and relation.
4. Leaf through the book noting what visual aids it may have, such as pictures, graphs, charts, marginal notes, summary boxes, sub-headings and the like. Being aware of these aids will help you when you read closely.
5. Look at the very back of the book for a reference list, a glossary, and/or any appendixes. Appendixes often contain answer keys to in-text chapter quizzes, charts, supplementary material, etc.
6. Find and bookmark any online material or study guides that are a companion to the text. If you cannot find any reference to any on-line material, ask your professor.

Once you have previewed your textbook and are familiar with the layout of the material and the learning aids provided by the author, you are ready to read the assigned chapters. To be an effective reader you will need to read actively using the **Active Reading Strategies** suggested below.

Active Reading Strategies

The active reading strategies explained below can be used separately or can be combined to help you read, understand and recall the main ideas from your readings. The strategies you select for each textbook and the order in which you apply them will depend on the nature of the material, how central the textbook is to your learning and your own needs as a learner. The goal is to create a customized reading approach for each text to make your reading effective and efficient.

Survey the Chapter

The first step toward good study reading is to **survey** the chapter. This gives you an overview or a general sense of what the chapter is about before you try to read closely. Surveying a chapter provides you with an idea of the length of material to be read and an idea of the time needed to read the assignment; gives you a general idea of what the material will be about; triggers any prior knowledge you might have about the subject material; and increases your motivation to read by giving you a purpose and direction for reading. To conduct a survey reading of a chapter, follow the steps outlined below:

1. Read the **chapter title** and glance at the **chapter outline**, if there is one.
2. Read the introduction and any learning objectives that might be specified. This is all the material that is between the chapter title and the first main heading.
3. Flip through the chapter reading the headings and subheadings as well as the captions under the pictures, charts, graphs or illustrations. Headings not only reveal the author's organization of material but also provide you with key phrases which reveal a chapter's basic content. Subheadings are break downs of main headings. They usually reveal the important points related to the major heading.
4. At the end of the chapter, read the summary of main points. A summary will give you all the important points of the chapter which will help you to identify the main ideas when you read for detail.
5. Last, at the end of the chapter look to see if there is a reference list related to the contents of the chapter and/or a chapter glossary. You may be required to do further class assignments on the topic and may need to check the glossary for definitions of key terms.
6. If there is no chapter outline provided for the chapter, consider making your own. A chapter outline provides you with the big-picture at a glance and acts as a useful study tool.

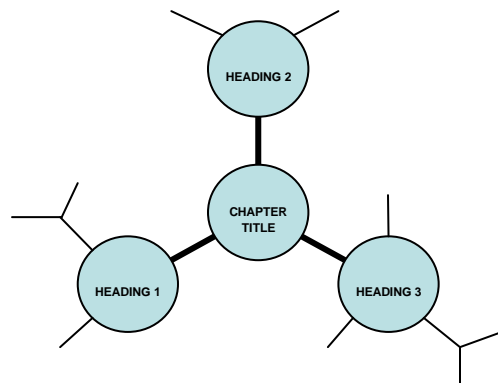
Make a Chapter Overview

After survey reading the chapter, create an overview of the chapter in either outline format or as a mind map that you can refer to as you read or can use as a review tool prior to an exam. Creating a chapter overview involves using the main headings, sub-headings and sub-sub-headings from the chapter in one of the formats shown below:

Chapter overview in outline format:

- Chapter Title**
- I. First Main Heading**
 - A. Sub-heading**
 - B. Sub-heading**
 - II. Second Main Heading**
 - A. Sub-heading**
 - 1. Sub-sub-heading**

Chapter overview in mind map format:



Create Guide Questions

As you read a chapter, formulate **guide questions** from the textbook headings, subheadings and main ideas as you work your way through the material. Guide questions give you a purpose for reading, help you identify main ideas and key supporting details, and help you prepare for exams by anticipating possible test questions. Questions can be generated before you read, while you read, or after you read. In general, guide questions that lead you to main idea ideas include **what, why, and how** questions, while the questions **who, where, when, and which**, tend to help you find supporting details. Some examples of turning textbook headings into guide questions are given below:

Sample Heading

The Black Protest

Possible Guide Questions

What is the Black Protest?
 Why did the protest occur?
 When and where did the protest occur?
 Who was involved in the protest?

Read Flexibly

Once you have formulated your guide questions from the section heading, you then **read** to find the answers. The key to reading efficiently is to modify your reading rate to suit the difficulty level of the material. Start by reading at a moderate rate and then slow down your reading rate when you hit a difficult passage or material that you know is important. In order to conduct an effective close reading of the material, follow the steps below:

1. Carefully read **one paragraph at a time** looking for the answers to your guide questions or looking for the main idea of the passage. At the end of the paragraph, STOP, and reflect on what you just read. Look up any unfamiliar vocabulary or re-read the paragraph more slowly if you did not understand it the first time.
2. Read all the **added attractions** in the section you are working on. Most textbooks have pictures, maps, graphs, tables and other illustrations which supplement or clarify what the author is saying. Remember that a picture speaks a thousand words!
3. Read very carefully all the **underlined, italicized, or bold printed words or phrases**. When terms are printed in different sizes, types or colour, it means the author is calling attention to them.

Mark the Main Ideas

Once you have found the answers to your questions or identified the main points of the passage, you need to mark this information for future review. To prevent over marking, read each paragraph first and then decide what needs to be emphasized, if anything. The various strategies for marking text material are as follows:

Highlight: In order to prevent over marking, highlight the sentence that states the main idea completely but mark the key supporting details as keywords and phrases only. Also, create a color-coding system using different colored highlighters to represent certain types of material. For example, all main ideas are marked in yellow, all terms and definitions are marked in green, all formulas are marked in pink, etc.

Use Brackets: If an entire paragraph or two is important, rather than highlighting all the material, draw a bracket in the margin showing where the important material begins and where it ends. Place a note next to the bracket indicating the nature or topic of the material to be reviewed.

Circle Key Terms: To emphasize the terms that you need to know, circle the term and underline the definition. This enables you to find terms you need to review during the week quickly and efficiently.

Write Marginal Notes: As you read, write brief notes in the margin of your text. These could be summaries of key points, important facts, questions that your material answers, or terms that you need to know. When reviewing, these notes help you to focus on what is important.

Take Study/Summary Notes

In addition to or instead of marking the important points in the text, many students benefit from taking summary notes. The advantage of taking summary notes is that the act of taking them often helps students remember the material better. Plus, the notes can be used for exam review purposes later in the term. Summary notes can be made for an entire chapter or can be used to summarize only the most important concepts or topics from a chapter. Summary notes can be taken in any of the following formats:

1. Basic list of key points or facts
2. Outline format
3. Two-Column notes
4. Comparison Chart
5. Index cards

Review Markings and/or Study Notes

In order to keep what you have read alive in working memory it is essential to **review** your markings and/or study notes on a regular basis. Just reviewing the material several days before an exam will likely not be enough. In order to ensure you have a good grasp of the material it needs to be reviewed immediately after the chapter is complete, again several weeks later and one last time prior to an exam.

Strategies to use when conducting a review of your material are as follows:

1. Learn the answers to the questions you created while reading
2. Look at the chapter overview you created and recall everything you know about each heading
3. Explain the material out loud to yourself or to anyone who will listen
4. Do any practice exercises or chapter review questions provide in the text or on-line
5. Participate in a study group.

As can be seen, being an active reader involves much more than just reading the material. As an active reader you will need to think, question, write, and talk as you read. This will provide you with a deeper understanding of the material and will improve your ability to recall what you have read.

For more information or help with becoming an active reader, please make an appointment with the Learning Specialist at the North Vancouver Campus by calling 604.984.1744.