

How to Study: The SQ3R Method

Five Steps to Success

I. Survey

1. Read using a special technique called “skimming.” Skimming is a quick read, looking only for specific information, such as author, table of contents, chapter headings, glossary, and appendices. This is designed to give an overview of the kinds of material available.
2. Select a chapter or a section to read. Write down the main topic, who, what, when, where, as well as any unknown terms. NOTE: reading for more than 30 minutes at a time may be counterproductive. Instead, try reading for 10 minutes at a time, then take a short break. When you come back to the material, see if you can “tell yourself the story of what you read” in a way that makes sense. If you can, then move to the next part of the reading. If you are confused, re-read the section. Make notes of any questions or points of confusion. You will need to come back to these questions later, perhaps in class or in an e-mail to your professor.

II. Question

Who, what, when, where, and what is the main point? What aspect is your weakest point of understanding? What information, if any, will you need to memorize?

III. Read

Reading for content is an active process. It is **not** the same thing as skimming. You should have your notebook open and take notes in outline form. (See note-taking handout.) If a summary follows a section, read the summary **first**. This provides an excellent overview of the main points as well as cues for when your notes are going to need more detail. This “preloading” of information familiarizes you with the material more quickly. Again, do not move on until you can “tell yourself the story” of that section. Write down the questions that you have at that part in the reading.

IV. Recite

1. Do your best to answer your questions within the material. If that fails, ask the professor in class or via e-mail. Chances are good that if you have a question, someone else will have the same question.
2. Use keywords to relate ideas and blocks of information. Try to make a “map” of the relationships between ideas. Answer the question of how they fit together. Repeat the process until the section or chapter is complete.

V. Review

Check your memory by reciting the main points and any sub-points. Review your notes for completeness as soon after class as possible, making any clarifications as necessary. A weekly review will keep the information fresh, shorten the time it takes for exam review, and allow you to make links to other ideas and new material much easier. Make sure than you plan enough time to do all the steps. After you have learned this system, you can tailor it to your own needs and study habits.