P-R-R: How to Read Your Textbook More Efficiently

PREVIEW - READ - RECALL at first glance seems to be time consuming, but with practice you will be amazed by how much you remember. Give it a try!

PREVIEW

If you know generally what the text is about you will be able to link this to other information that will help you to understand and remember what you read.

1. Before you read, spend 2 seconds a page to look over the text:
   - Title -- Introduction -- Sub-headings -- First sentences of each paragraph (should give main idea) -- Any diagrams, charts, etc. -- Conclusions or summaries -- Quiz questions.

2. Then answer the following questions:
   - What is this mainly about?
   - How is it organized?
   - How difficult is it?
   - About how long will it take to read?

   (Most people read at about 250 words per minute. How many words are there on a page of this text? Time yourself reading for one minute. How many words did you read? How long will it take to read a page? How long do you need to read each section of this chapter or article?)

READ ACTIVELY

Involve yourself in the text. Working on understanding the material will combat boredom and will increase retention.

1. Set realistic time goals and number of pages to be read.
2. Divide your chapter into small (1/2 page? 1 column?) sections, rather than try to read the whole chapter non-stop.
3. Ask yourself a question before each paragraph or section, then seek its answer. This will give you a definite purpose for your reading. Try inverting the sub-heading or first sentence into question form, using "who," "what," "when," or "how" if necessary.

4. Take breaks when you feel unable to stay with the material due to day-dreaming, drowsiness, boredom, hunger, etc. After a short break, you can return to your reading with more energy and alertness.

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**RECALL**

40 - 50% of the material we read is forgotten very shortly (about 15 minutes after we read it). Immediate recall is an essential first step toward continued retention of the material.

After reading each small section of material, choose one (or more) of the following methods:

1. Recall mentally or recite orally the highlights of what you have read.
2. Ask yourself questions (maybe the same ones you used before you read the section) and answer them in your own words.
3. Underline and make marginal notes of the key words or phrases in the section. You should be able to make a sentence or phrase from the key words underlined in a paragraph that reflects the main idea for each paragraph. Underlining after you read is the best way to decide what the most important information to remember is.
4. Make separate notes, outlines, or flashcards of what you have read, which you need to put into your own words.
5. Recall with a friend. What you don’t recall, he or she might.

Adapted from the UT Learning Centre at the University of Texas at Austin.