



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 leaning.

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 returned on an exam, **“Darn, I thought I knew that.”**

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

