

SQ3R Reading Strategy

Reading at the university can be challenging because of the

- amount of reading
“I have to read 100 pages a week or more!”
- short length of time to complete readings
“I have to finish 4 books in my summer course!”
- density or level of difficulty of the reading material
“I can’t seem to find the main idea!”

If you find yourself struggling with some or all of the above reading challenges, you should try SQ3R, a reading strategy designed to help students improve their comprehension (understanding), memory, and efficiency in reading. The strategy consists of five steps that deepen your thinking as you read.

Survey

Survey means flip through the pages assigned with the purpose of getting a “general idea” about what the chapter, section, or article is about. This step begins the active reading process. By seeing how the chapter is organized and what topics will be covered, you can begin to organize the material as you read, enhancing your memory. You don’t need to spend a lot of time on this stage, just quickly look over the:

- titles, headings, and sub-headings
- introduction and conclusion
- questions
- figures, graphs, tables, or diagrams
- words or ideas in **bold** or *italics*
- summary or abstract
- the number of pages you need to read
- the level of difficulty

The objective at this point is to figure out:

- the direction or purpose of the topic
“What is this about? What are they trying to teach me?”
- the language necessary to understand the topic
“What is the key vocabulary needed to understand this topic?”
- an estimate of how much time you need to complete the reading task
“Will I be able to read this in one study session?”
“How much time will I need to get through this reading?”

Question

Using the information you gathered at the survey stage, prepare some questions about what you want to/need to learn in the reading task. You can do this by:

- turning a heading into a question
- turning **boldface** or *italicized* words into a question
- using the chapter’s questions
- using the course objectives to make questions
- making your own questions based on your own interest in the topic

Example questions include:

“Why is this concept or idea important?”

“How does this idea relate to ideas in earlier sections?”

“Why do they use this word so often in the chapter?”

“How is this idea related to what we talked about in class?”

“I learned about this idea before. How is this information different?”

Although some students are tempted to skip this stage and start reading, research tells us it is important to formulate questions in order to:

- keep you alert and involved in the reading (otherwise you might feel sleepy or unable to concentrate)
- help you remember what you read by linking it to what you already know or linking it to what you have learned in lecture

For these reasons, it helps to write your questions on a piece of paper or separate document and write them in your own words.

Read

Go for it! However, don't “go for it” in a passive, sleepy, “I don't feel like doing this” kind of way. Be active while you read by:

- underlining or highlighting key ideas (limit yourself to 10% of the page-not everything is important, so make choices)
- jotting down notes, questions, comments, or symbols in the margins
- trying to answer your questions
- noticing and noting down information that is directly related to what you talked about in lecture (you may want to take out your lecture notes)
- making a list of questions to ask your professor during class or office hours

Recite

After you have completed a section of the reading, close your text and put away your notes for a moment. In your own words, either out loud or on paper, can you:

- summarize purpose of the reading?
- the main ideas?
- the key terms?
- the answers to your initial questions?

The truth is that you may have to peek at your notes or your text a few times. However, reciting is a good test of how well you have understood the section. If you have great difficulty reciting, you may not be reading actively, or you may need some help from a classmate, study group, or your professor to understand the ideas. Don't wait to seek some extra help if you need it.

Review

This stage is important to “glue” the key information into your memory. It is important for the information to “stick” now so that you do not have to relearn it again later (in a stressful all-night cram session the night before the exam, for example).

Reviewing is not reading over the notes you made from the textbook again and again. Reviewing means that you do something different with the information, such as:

- make a map, table, or diagram of the information
- make flash cards
- write out the key ideas in your own words
- teach/tell someone else
- do the practice questions at the end of the chapter
- make up potential test questions and quiz yourself
- make a timeline

For the best results, review the next day, the next week, and once a month until the final exam for the course.

References

Robinson, F.P. (1970). *SQ3R: Effective study* (4th ed.). Harper & Row.