LEARNING FROM TEXTS

Students enrolled in an educational psychology class were asked to describe how they read their educational psychology textbook. Below are two sets of comments. The first is from students who average below 70% on three course exams. The second is from students who average above 90% on the same exams. What conclusions might you draw about the reading activities of high and low achievers?

Students below 70%

1. I figure out key words in the paragraph. I try to understand what the author is trying to get across.
2. I look for boldface words and read the sentences before and after the boldface.
3. I read the paragraph once. I then reread the material and highlight what I feel is important.
4. I read through the paragraphs. I usually read the boldface or italicized words with their meanings. If possible, I sometimes read aloud.
5. I highlight the important information. I read straight through most of the time without going back.
6. When reading I skim through the chapter and focus on italicized or boldface words. Then I read the whole paragraph completely.
7. As I read I highlight important information like definitions or important sentences or paragraphs, if necessary. If I don’t understand, I reread the paragraph.

Students Above 90%

1. I pay attention for the main idea and any technical terms. Sometimes I stop and relate information to other information (read in previous paragraphs or somewhere else in the chapter) or just stop to assimilate what I’ve just read.
2. I try to visualize an organization of the information, a sort of chart in my head. I try to think of examples for definitions that I can relate to better than those in the book. I try to pick out the important words or phrases. I try to connect the last idea with the next one.
3. When I read a chapter I visualize myself in the examples that are given. I try to relate the words I don’t know to words that I know. When I use my own life experiences for examples, I understand the words and examples better.
4. When I read I try to understand what the paragraph is about and try to relate it to what I already know about the subject. I also try to relate what has been said in class to make connections between the two.
5. When I read I try to fit the new information to what I already know and try to create as complete a picture as possible of what I am reading. Doing this helps me organize my notes.
6. When I read I underline parts I feel are important and are going to help me make connections when I note the chapter. I sometimes reread something to make it fit with what I am learning.
7. I try to make connections as I read to what I’ve read beforehand in the summary or to class discussions. I try to organize my thoughts and predict what the next step might be. I remain active in my reading.
HOW TO READ A TEXTBOOK

Think about it. Textbooks are the only books you read today that have pictures on nearly every page (Dr. Seuss fans excluded). In fact, should you be forced to read a textbook without pictures, you are in real trouble. Those books get seriously tough. Nevertheless, understanding how to read a textbook is vital.

The goal of a textbook is simple: inform and educate.

The goal of the Harry Potter books is very different. Novels tell stories. Textbooks communicate ideas through explanations of information. Because of this, you need a different strategy for reading textbooks, especially because in college you are responsible to study and learn information independently.

In college, you have a ton of material to read and most professors do not have time to cover all of it in class, or point out the most important areas in the book.

But luckily, this sheet of paper is going to tell you some tricks on how to read a chapter of your textbook like a pro.

**Pro Tip #1: Do Not Read the Entire Chapter**

So Take Advantage of this!

1. **Go to the questions at the end of the chapter first.** Read them and answer them to the best of your ability. This will get your engine ready.
2. **Read the final summary of the chapter.** This way, you’ll know exactly what’s going to be covered.
3. **Look at the headings and subdivisions of the chapter.** This helps you see the BIG picture for how the chapter is laid out. You should also make note of the vocab and terminology, which are usually highlighted or bolded for your viewing and learning pleasure. And do not forget to look closely at the diagrams, graphs, and illustrations. They’re there to clarify the important points of the text.
4. **Read the introduction.** The beginning of the chapter will help you hone in on what the point of the reading is.
5. **Read the chapter.** But ideally you should read only parts you do not understand. Because you have already gone through and read the summary and terms, you should understand what you know and do not know.
6. **Take Notes and Make Summaries.** Just because you have read the chapter, doesn’t mean that’s enough for learning. You have also got to take notes. Also, creating a summary of the various sections in the chapter can help you preserve the knowledge you just learned.

**Pro Tip #2: Do Not Read the Chapter Front to Back**

Instead, read the chapter backwards. I promise that textbooks rarely build to a suspenseful twist at the end. A sentence like, “And then, Abraham Lincoln dodged the bullet!” will never appear.

**Pro Tip #3: Read the Chapter Once and Your Notes Multiple Times**

If you have done your reading and note taking right, all you’ll need to do is review your notes to study and retain the information. Study up, and you’ll be sure to ace your next test!