

TWU Counseling Center

Reading and Study Time

1. Read in three steps: In the first step, survey the material by reading the titles, sub-titles, bold print, italics, definitions, topic sentences, summaries, and conclusions. This will provide you with an overview of the chapter, give you direction, and help you to see the details in relation to the whole. In the second step, form questions out of the titles and sub-titles using the Six Keys to Reading -- who, what, why, when, where, and how; then read to select what you want to learn. You should indicate your selection by underlining words or phrases you wish to remember, by making marginal notes. In the third step, review the material you have selected or marked for learning in order to assimilate it. The first process was to help you get your bearing; the second, to evaluate and select material, the third, to impress upon yourself the ideas you selected for future use.
2. Spend half your reading and study time in reproducing. The final test of learning is in communicating what you have studied or experienced. Mere reading is mere impression. Therefore, in an hour of study the individual who spends half of the time trying to write, say, or think about what he or she has read will be able to reproduce twice as many ideas as the individual who spends all of the time in passive reading. After you have read your book, close it, and then attempt to recall what you have read, review to fill in any gaps in your knowledge or to find the right words to express the ideas, re-test yourself and review again. The cycle is read and recite, read and recite, read and recite until you feel confident in your knowledge of the material in that book.
3. Review when forgetting is greatest. Most academic learning fades away unless it is used or reviewed. The greatest amount of forgetting usually occurs within the first twenty-four hours after study. Therefore, lecture notes taken today or material read today should be reviewed that same day. If the material is in outline form, underlined, noted in other ways, or condensed in note form, probably only ten percent of the total assignment need be reviewed. This should normally take ten to fifteen minutes for each subject.
4. Review frequently. Because of delayed recall (the examinations next month, and the finals) periodic review is necessary. An hour's review often results in as much actual learning as five or six hours of original study. A short weekly review of about thirty minutes for all notes taken that week will pay high dividends on all examinations and in more permanent learning for use in later years.
5. Know what you are supposed to learn. While surveying a chapter you can obtain a perspective in evaluating the merits of various ideas. Usually, an instructor has certain preferences which you should discover from his or her emphasis in lectures, from questions asked in class, or if necessary from private conferences. In addition to the instructor's preferences, however, there are general requirements which of necessity must be learned about most topics. Questions will vary from subject to subject but illustrative "must-answers" are:
 - a. What are the chief characteristics of this?
 - b. Define it.
 - c. What are the causes? What are the theories, or the hypotheses?
 - d. What are the results of this?
 - e. How is this classified?
 - f. How is this similar or how does it differ from such and such?
 - g. What is the relationship of this to something else studied?

In other words, a student's understanding of a topic may be examined and it is better that one examine oneself before the instructor does so by such questions as: who, what, why, when, where, how, explain, compare, define, give the causes of, name the results of, illustrate, give reasons for, identify and classify.

6. Space your learning. Studying two hours a day five days a week, for four weeks ordinarily results in more learning than forty hours of study crammed into a four-day period. Learning is assimilation, a settling process, growth--all of which requires time.
7. Know word meanings. Precise word meaning is basic to the understanding of an assignment. Use a dictionary or the glossary in your text or in a lecture. Both a general and a specific vocabulary are necessary for understanding most university subjects.
8. Make ideas meaningful. Ideas from books become more meaningful when you have paraphrased them, when you have a ready example, illustration, application, comparison, contrast, and classification. Ideas become more meaningful when related to other ideas, when reacted to, when analyzed, compared, and synthesized. Many ideas may be expressed as a single general principle. Thus, reading and study--learning and reproducing--are dependent upon thinking.
9. Supplementary reading may add meaning to assignments. When textbooks or lectures are difficult, reading in books with simpler vocabulary or with more pictures, illustrations of definitions may permit you to bring meaningfulness to your text or lecture notes. Such supplementary reading may add to the clarity of regular assignments. As you extend your meanings, both reading speed and comprehension improve. One of the best practices for improving the speed of reading, the problem of many college students, is to read widely in more elementary books related to the field of difficulty.
10. Learn of other helps in reading and study. A study schedule helps most students to spend their time wisely and insure adequate time for study. A regular place for study, particularly one which is quiet and well lighted, aids in learning and personal efficiency. Learning to use an index may save time otherwise spent in thumbing through a book to locate forgotten ideas. Proper visual functioning, motivation, health and seeing value in what is being studied-- all of these are conducive to economy in reading, study, and learning.