SQ4R – A Reading Strategy

The key to being a good and successful reader is to make reading an active process, instead of simply passively moving your eyes along the page. You need to work at understanding what you are reading, search for main details, link ideas together, and understand new vocabulary. The goal is to try to do all of this while only reading the chapter once. You don’t have time to re-read.

The following reading strategy can help you become a more active reader.

S – Survey
Preview the chapter before reading it. Read the introduction to get an idea of what will be covered in the chapter. Scan the headings and subheading, pictures, graphs, etc. Get a feel for what the chapter is about and also how long you expect it to take to read. Divide the chapter into sections.

Q – Question
Before reading, turn the headings and subheadings into questions that you will try to find the answer to while reading. Write them down. This makes reading more active because you are doing something with the information.

An example of a heading you might find in a Sociology text is “Ethnocentrism”. Turning this into a question could give you “What is ethnocentrism?” If ethnocentrism was a subheading under the heading “Culture”, the question could be “What is ethnocentrism and how does it affect culture?”

R – Read
Now it is time to read! While reading a section, try to answer the question you created. Look for main ideas, new vocabulary and try to link information with other things you have learned so far (from the prof’s lectures and the text). Don’t just passively move your eyes along the lines of the page. THINK about what you are reading and what it means.

R – Recite/Rephrase
Once you have read a section and found the answer to your question (which should be the main idea of the paragraph/section), ask yourself if you understand it. The key to knowing if you understand or not is if you can rephrase the idea in your own words. If you can’t do it, you probably don’t have a good enough grasp of the concept. Read it over again and look at any examples that are provided.
R – Record
Now write down the answer to your questions and any other important points that you feel are worth studying and remembering. Try not to just copy – put things in your own words. It is easier to remember something that is in our words than something that is in someone else’s.

There is no need to write complete sentences. Use points as much as possible. One of the major goals of creating these notes is to condense the information as much as possible.

R – Review
Once you have pulled out the main ideas from the text and written them down, you no longer need the textbook. Spend your time reviewing the notes that you have made. It is much easier to work with a condensed version of the information.

Review your notes regularly so that you will not have to re-learn everything by the time the midterm and exam come along.

The SQ4R method of study is easy to understand, but can be difficult to put into practice on a regular basis. Initially it may seem to take too much time, but time spent studying as assignments are read is time saved when studying for exams. Also, you do not need to follow the steps rigidly; experiment and modify the method to best fit your needs. Students who learn to use SQ4R typically find it to be well worth the effort. Try it out!

Reading Tips

- **Highlight and Tabulate**: Highlight and mark important information so that you can find it again later. Don’t highlight too much. You want the important points to stand out.
- **Write in the margins**: Annotate your text material with comments, questions, examples, and more.
- **Read out loud**: Rather than reading silently in your head, read your material out loud, either to someone else, or to an invisible audience.
- **Explain what you have read to someone else**: Relaying information to other people helps you understand it better. It can also help you notice information that you haven’t quite grasped or understood.
- **Test yourself**: After you’ve read a chapter, try to write down key points without checking the text. Refer to your learning objectives!