

Reading Effectively using SQ3R

SQ3R is a reading strategy formed from its letters:

Survey! Question! Read! Recite! Review!

It is a reading and studying system that helps to build a framework to understand reading assignment and material. It is extremely effective for both comprehension and memory retention as it actively involves the reader.

Before you actually read a chapter, or go over a particular section of notes, take five minutes to Survey the material.

- Briefly check the title, headings, and subheadings to understand the author's organisational pattern of ideas to be discussed
- Scan all visual material and captions under pictures, charts, graphs or maps
- Read introductory, concluding and summary paragraphs
- Review questions

This preview will enable you to anticipate what the chapter is about.

As you survey the material Question what you are reading.

- Create interest in the material as you read by asking, "What are the main points of the chapter/paragraph?"
- Turn the title, headings, and/or subheadings into questions
- Read questions at the end of the chapters or after each subheading
- Ask yourself, "What did my lecturer say about this chapter or subject when it was assigned?"
- Ask yourself, "What do I already know about this subject?"

Note: If it is helpful to you, write out the questions for consideration.

This variation is called **SQW3R**

The above gives you a clearly defined purpose for reading and helps you maintain interest in the material.

Read the chapter actively for meaning.

- Look for answers to the questions you first raised
- Go through paragraphs before underlining, then underline key words and phrases to help you recall the main points
- Be selective; you don't want to highlight non-important points or miss anything that can help your comprehension
- Answer questions at the beginning or end of chapters or study guides
- Reread captions under pictures, graphs
- Note all the underlined, italicised, bold printed words or phrases
- Study graphic aids
- Read only a section at a time and recite after each section
- Reduce your speed for difficult passages
- Stop and reread parts which are not clear
- Summarise main concepts in your own words in the margins

The more active you are in the reading process, the more you will retain.

After every few pages or a section, close your book/turn over your notes and Recite aloud the main points to the questions you posed in Step 2.

- Orally ask yourself questions about what you have just read, or summarise, in your own words, what you read. Verify your answer by checking the text
- Take notes from the text but write the information in your own words
- Take as much time as you need to answer your questions
- Underline or highlight important points you've just read
- Reciting: The more senses you use, the more likely you are to remember what you read Triple strength learning: Seeing, saying, hearing
- Quadruple strength learning: Seeing, saying, hearing, writing!!!

Don't be frustrated, this takes more time, but the information will be clearer in your mind.



Finally, Review the chapter every so often to fix the material in your mind. This step is an ongoing process. Numerous reviews are a lot more effective than trying to cram information in one night before an exam or submission. Here is a plan to guide you:

Day One

- After you have read and recited the entire chapter, write questions in the margins for those points you have highlighted or underlined
- If you took notes while reciting, write questions for the notes you have taken in the margins of your notebook
- Conduct a *critical reading review*

Reading critically entails answering the following questions as you read (See Step 2)

What is the general topic?	
What is the main issue or problem statement?	
What is the conclusion?	
What are reasons for their conclusion?	
How is this conclusion related to your assignment topic or subject area?	
What have they not considered?	
What suggestions can you offer as a way forward?	

Characteristics of Critical Readers

- They are honest with themselves
- They resist manipulation
- They overcome confusion
- They ask questions

- They base judgments on evidence
- They look for connections between subjects
- They are intellectually independent

Day Two

- Page through the text and/or your notebook to re-acquaint yourself with the important points
- Cover the columns of your text/notebook and orally ask yourself the questions in the margins
- Orally recite or write the answers from memory
- Develop mnemonic devices (acronyms) for material which need to be memorised
- Make flash cards for those questions which give you difficulty

Days Three, Four and Five

- Alternate between your flashcards and notes and test yourself (orally or in writing) on the questions you formulated
- Make additional flash cards if necessary

Weekend

- Using the text and notebook, make a Table of Contents - list all the topics and sub-topics you need to know from the chapter
- From the Table of Contents, make a Study Sheet/ Spatial Map/Mind Map
- Recite the information orally and in your own words as you put the Study Sheet/Map together
- As you have consolidated all the information you need for this chapter, periodically review the Sheet/Map so that at test time you will not have to cram

The SQ3R is time-consuming at first, expect it to take 10-15% longer to read a given chapter when you first begin. You will see an increase in retention after two months of using the system and, eventually, a reduction in time spent preparing for your exams.

Adapted from Robinson, Francis Pleasant. Effective Study. 4th ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1970
 & from Ruth Sunda & Kyrene de las Brisas: Bloom's Critical Thinking/Questioning Strategies

