

Reading Strategies: PQ4R/SQ3R

The best way to read your textbooks, and get the most out of them, is to use an active reading strategy. At Laurier, we recommend a scan, read, review technique: the PQ4R method (sometimes known as SQ3R). It is an active reading strategy that is designed to help you better understand, remember and retain the material you read. The method can be broken down as follows:

1. Preview/Scan

Previewing is what some people refer to as scanning and is the first step to reading actively. To get an idea of what your reading is about, read the main titles, subheadings, chapter review/ summary and bold terms. For books without headings read the first and last sentence of each paragraph to understand the topic and conclusion of the paragraph. This step should take less than five minutes.

2. Question

In this step you should formulate a list of questions about the material. You can use your preview to make your own questions. If you are using the questions found at the end of the chapter or the ones your professor provided for you, make sure you read over them before you begin reading (although generating your own questions will help you to better engage in the material).

A great tip for this stage is to write out your questions on a piece of paper with gaps between the questions. You can fill in these gaps as you do your readings or when you get to the review stage. You can also use these questions to create a mock exam to help you to test yourself. Knowing the question type of future exams ahead of time will help you to generate appropriate questions.

Key questions you might ask yourself include:

- What are the key concepts?
- What sequences, steps or time lines are involved in this information?
- How does this reading fit in with other course topics?
- Which theories, topics and concepts link together? (Compare and contrast.)
- What are the key points, theories, concepts, etc.?

This step only needs to take five to ten minutes.

3. Read

Read the relevant sections, picking out main ideas, points and key terms as you go. It is important that you adjust your reading speed to the difficulty of the material (i.e., for harder readings, you may need to read slower). While you are reading, focus on information that has been emphasized in lectures, tutorials and labs.

It is better to read your textbooks in chunks instead of complete chapters. Chunking your readings and using the PQ4R method to loop through the information will allow you to better engage with the material and maintain your concentration. Many students find PQ4R daunting, but with practice it is very effective and efficient. If your mind begins to wander, take a break. You should also take a break after reading a section (for example, a page or subsection) and summarize or paraphrase the material you read. You can do this in the margin of the textbook, on a sticky note, or on a separate piece of paper. For suggestions, see the Noting for Gist handout.

4. Reflect

As you read, reflect on what you are reading. Consider what examples, images or graphs are important and how they fit into the bigger picture. You should also reflect on what connections you can make between what you already know and what you are reading as well as on any connections that exist between key topics, concepts or theories.

5. Recite

After you are finished reading, refer to the questions you created before you began. You should be able to answer all of these questions now. If you can't, go back and re-read the appropriate section. Re-visit your questions and try answering them again.

A great way to recite is to fill in the spaces between your questions. While you are doing this, try and refer to your textbook as little as possible. Another way to recite is to spend one or two minutes and write down everything you have learned from your readings. Then compare your recitation to the textbook and see if you forgot something. The recitation process can often become your study notes. This step only needs to take ten minutes.

6. Review

You should regularly review what you have learned – not just before exams! In order to be able to readily recall information, you should be exposed to it as often as possible. You can check that you have understood material by re-answering the questions you came up with originally. Alternatively, at the beginning of each textbook chapter you may find learning objectives or outcomes. Use these objectives and outcomes to self-check whether you understood the main concepts. Moreover, completing any in-chapter quizzes and end-of-chapter review questions can help you to further check your understanding of the content and identify any concepts you may need to review further.