

The SQ3R Reading Formula Really Works

Perhaps the most common error by students in studying is in the method they use to read an assignment. For example, when students come home from school, they quite commonly just throw their history books on the table and head straight for the refrigerator.

They know they have a chapter to read, but they don't want to read it right away. So, instead, they procrastinate. They put it off until later, and too often the "later" never comes.

If they eventually do get their book out and open it up, they do so, not because they want to, but because either their parents have reminded them or they feel like they just have to get the nasty business of reading the chapter done and out of the way. So, they open the book to the chapter and begin what they believe is reading.

Actually, what they are doing is simply pronouncing the words mentally, in a deadly monotone, inside their heads. They begin with the first sentence and plod on to the last. When they have finished listening to themselves read, they can't remember what it is they have read. In fact, sometimes they never even finish because they have lulled themselves to sleep.

This, of course, is an absolute waste of time.

Students who don't like to waste their time and who want to be able to comprehend what it is they are reading must learn to approach their reading assignment differently.

First of all, they should set a time and a place for their study. This avoids the psychological block of having to do something distasteful. The reason is that once we start doing something out of HABIT, we just do it. We don't think about it. It's a habit. If we don't think about it and just do it, it's a lot easier.

Secondly, students should get into the habit of using what many reading experts call the SQ3R reading formula. Instead of starting with the first sentence and plowing on through to the end, students who are using SQ3R begin by using the S in SQ3R which stands for:

SURVEY

QUESTION

READ

REVIEW

RECITE

Students should look at the chapter title, the headings, the pictures, graphs, etc., and should even look at the questions at the end. This is just SURVEYING.

All the time that they are SURVEYING the chapter, their minds should be actively involved. They should be trying to figure out what the chapter is really concerned with and what it is that the teacher will expect them to know. This, of course, is the QUESTION step. In today's academic jargon it would be called establishing a general schema for a specific reading.

Then, after the students have previewed or SURVEYED the chapter and have certain QUESTIONS in mind that need answering, they begin to READ.

REMEMBER: SQ3R

S=SURVEY

Q=QUESTION

R#1=READ

As students READ the chapter, their minds should be active. They should let their mind recall other related items. In fact, it is a form of REVIEWing related material—or in today's jargon, it is activating relevant schemata.

As they read, students should also try to anticipate what will be coming next. When they come to the end of sections within the chapter, the serious students will RECITE (R#3 of SQ3R). They will recite to themselves what they think the author is trying to get at, what they think is important to remember, and what it is they still don't understand or—equally important—don't agree with.

Good readers don't just nod their heads yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, until they fall asleep. Good readers think while they are reading. Good readers question. Good readers ask themselves while they are reading:

Is that really so?

Is that really a fact?

Or is that merely the author's opinion?

Is that the opinion of most experts?

Students who honestly try the SQ3R approach to studying almost universally find it successful. (Fact? Opinion? Would quoting one, two, or three studies make a difference?) So, why don't you stop boring yourself when you're studying. Instead of just listening to that voice inside your skull calling out words when you pick up your history book, why don't you, just once, follow the SQ3R formula by

Surveying
Questioning
Reading
Reviewing
Reciting

You will be glad you did.