Tips for Reading Textbooks

Reading without a purpose leads to lesser comprehension and long-term memory; many students who read this way find it difficult to participate in class discussions and do as well on their exams, as they would like. If you read in 10-page chunks broken up over segments of time, you will recall more and have to do less re-reading later when you review. Another key feature to reading textbooks is to review - review 24 hours after reading and then just a few minutes each week will dramatically cut down on the cramming you might do for an exam. The tips below will help you to be an active (rather than passive) and effective reader/student:

Before Reading
- Preview to get the big picture. Read over: chapter objectives and headings, visual charts or pictures, and bolded vocabulary words - all of these components give you important clues about what the authors intended for you to understand about the chapter
- Read questions and summaries at start and end of the chapter to get an idea of the main points and questions to keep in mind
- Previewing helps decipher what you truly need to focus on, figure out what will make good study questions/areas, and a sense of where you need to spend more time versus less time in later study
- **ASK YOURSELF:** What do you already know about this topic? What will be the hardest to understand about the topic? What do I need to get out of this chapter and for what purpose am I reading it (i.e. homework, study, paper, research, class discussion, etc.)?

During Reading
- Active Reading
  - Plan to read about 10 pages at a time (while typically about a 1 hour block - give yourself a few hours to get an idea of your pace)
  - Read at least 1 full paragraph or short section before you highlight or take notes to get perspective of what’s important for each part
  - Try to visualize mental pictures of the material, Sometimes it even helps to draw out diagram or pictures to visualize information
  - Read aloud if you encounter complex information or you get distracted
  - Circle/highlight key terms/definitions
  - Pay close attention to visual representations such as charts, pictures, and diagrams - they clarify important points in the text
  - Identify the main idea(s) of each paragraph or section, state out loud or jot down
- Reading for significant facts
  - Illustrative facts: often have “for example” preceding the point
  - Definitions: typically are statements that are short and authoritative
  - Descriptions: more narrative in form, might recount or relate pieces of information
  - Explanations: either pull together differing opinions/concepts or set up the scene by describing relevant information about an idea

After Initial Reading

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In the margins or on a separate sheet, write 1-2 study/potential test questions for each paragraph or section
After reading 10 pages, try to go back and answer those questions to check for what you already comprehend and what you need to come back to (put a star where you need to study more)
Write down questions for your instructor or points you might want to make in class
Relate primary ideas: create outline of major ideas, list relevant details under each and why they are related to each other, list how each major idea relates to the others

*** The whole process of reading a chapter and taking notes will vary for each individual; you should plan about 3-5 hours per chapter until you get a system down ***

**Continued Review/Later Study**
• Try to explain it out loud or to someone - teaching material using your own words not only deepens comprehension but also clarifies what you really understand and what you need to learn more
• Write a summary of what you read in language that is meaningful to you
• Take a few minutes to organize your notes or flashcards
• **Review for 10-15 minutes 24 hours after reading by looking at notes or highlighted sections and answering identified study questions, then spend 10-15 minutes each week reviewing notes/highlights/study questions for each chapter** - this practice gets the information into long-term memory where it can best be learned and recalled for exams

**Keeping in Mind/Comprehension Tips**
• **Highlighting or Note-taking** - only a phrase or two that if you came back to weeks later would be all you’d have to read to get the gist of the paragraph/section; not just a couple words or whole sentences unless it's dates or definitions. Only 20% or less of the content should be highlighted.
• Sometimes transferring important text by handwriting or typing can get the information more deeply lodged in long-term memory to be retrieved at a later date
• Multiply the number of pages you have to read by 5 minutes - this is approximately how long you can anticipate reading. If it looks like a long block of time, think about breaking it up into 50-60 minute segments with breaks in between.

**References**
Baylor University: [http://www.baylor.edu/support_programs/index.php?id=42443](http://www.baylor.edu/support_programs/index.php?id=42443)
Cornell College: [https://www.cornellcollege.edu/academic-support-and-advising/study-tips/reading-textbooks.shtml](https://www.cornellcollege.edu/academic-support-and-advising/study-tips/reading-textbooks.shtml)

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