Are you looking for an approach to reading that is flexible, can be used for practically any subject, and will help you to get the most out of your reading? Then try...

The PQRST Reading Method!

P Q R S T stands for:
- Preview
- Question
- Read
- Self-recite
- Test

1. **Preview:** When previewing, you are looking for the best overall picture of what you are about to read. This tells you what the chapter, section, or book is about, and what particular issues within that topic will be discussed. Also, previewing allows you to determine your purpose for the reading, and how quickly or slowly you should read.

   **To preview a book:**
   - Read the preface or introduction, to note the author’s purpose in writing.
   - Look at the table of contents.
   - Page through the book, glancing at the chapter headings and subheadings, and at occasional sentences. Also note the terms in italics or **boldface**, pictures, graphs, and chapter summaries.

   **To preview a chapter or article:**
   - Read the headings or section titles, to see the main topics and their organization.
   - Note the subheadings and subtopic under each heading.
   - Pay attention to the order of the topics and subtopics.
   - Skim over the first and last sentences under each topic.
   - Skim over the chapter summary.

   One of the **best** things about previewing is that it takes **very little time to do**. Once you’ve had some practice, you’ll usually be able to preview a chapter in 5 minutes or less, and a book in 10 minutes or less. Better yet the **previewing ultimately SAVES you time** – lots! If you have a general idea about what a reading assignment covers, you will be able to determine how it relates to the course for which you’re reading, and what your want to learn from it. This will make your reading more focused and efficient. If after previewing, you can answer the questions, “What is the chapter or book about?” and “What main points will be discussed?”, your preview was successful!

2. **Question:** With specific questions in mind about a reading assignment, you will know exactly what information to look for – and you’ll be motivated to find it! This will help you to **learn as much as you can from reading**.

   - Start by turning the chapter headings and subheadings into questions. For example, if your Precalculus textbook has a chapter headed “Trigonometric Identities”, your question could be “What are trigonometric identities?” New terms can also be made into questions easily.
   - If other parts of the reading raised your curiosity during your Preview, make up a question about this, too.
   - Of course, if your textbook has study questions, you can use these!
   - Keep flexible when forming questions. The number you generate will depend on the length of the assignment and the amount of detail you want to learn.
   - You may also want to add or change questions as you read, if you notice important points that your original questions did not address.

3. **Read:** Your Preview and Questions have prepared you to read carefully and actively, so do this!
• Remember the features that you noticed during the last two steps: headings, subheadings, special terms, pictures, and summaries. Use these to guide you toward the main ideas.

• Remember also that each paragraph contains a main idea, and supporting ideas that elaborate on this. Look for these, and underline or highlight them. You may also want to jot down the main ideas in the margins.

• Read for ideas rather than single words: train your eyes to look at cluster of related words rather than at each individual word. Use your pen as you guide, by highlighting or underlining phrases or clusters of related words.

• This “cluster reading” will (a) increase your reading speed, by reducing the number of times your eyes stop, and (b) increase your comprehension, since you are training yourself to look at whole ideas at once. Also, if you only underline main idea phrases, this prevents you from underlining too much.

• Following these guidelines will ensure that you are answering your Questions as you read. Also, stay alert to terms or ideas your questions did not address.

• After each section (or about every 10 minutes, whichever makes sense), ask yourself, “Do I understand this? Am I learning what I wanted to?” This will lead you into the next step...

4. **Self-Recite:** In this step, you summarize for yourself what you just read. This allows you to check your understanding of the material, and will aid retention of it.

   • How to do it: *Without looking at the book*, recite the main headings and the main idea under each. Then – still without looking – tell yourself in a sentence or two what you read. Finally, scan over the section QUICKLY to pick up any essential points you may have missed.

   • Usually, it is helpful to stop and recite after each major section of a chapter, especially if the chapters are long.

   • You can recite in your head or aloud, but many students find it most effective if they jot down what they recite. This, of course, also makes it much easier to review later.

   • Many students also find Self-Reciting helpful because it requires monitoring their attention carefully, and improving it! If you are having difficulty Self-Reciting, this may mean you are not concentrating fully on the reading – but can also provide incentive for improving your concentration.

   • If you are studying subjects in which the pieces of information are not very meaningful by themselves (such as another language, or formulas, rules, and laws in math and science courses), you will spend a lot of your study time – often 90% or more – reciting. If you are studying a subject that involves well-connected narrative or descriptive material, such as history, sociology, philosophy, or literature, you will probably spend 30% or less of your study time reciting. However, reciting is an important step for all types of material, and it sets you up to...

5. **Test:** In this final step of PQRST, you make certain that you know and remember what you read. Testing yourself seals the material into your long-term memory – and every time your test yourself, you ensure that you will keep it there!

   • You should first test yourself within 24 hours of reading the material – without this, you are likely to forget most of it.

   • Start by recalling as much as you can without looking at the book or your recitation notes. If you have difficulty, look at the questions you wrote to jog your memory, but don’t look at your answers or other notes until you have given your memory a chance to work!

   • Now, look back over your recitation notes to make sure you remembered all the important points and main ideas. If you still think you missed something, look over the reading assignment, too.

   • After this initial Test session, do at least one more before you’ll be tested on the material. Again, the more you Test yourself, the more firmly the information will be planted in your long-term memory.

   • Many students find it helpful to test themselves on lecture notes from the class sessions related to a reading assignment at the same time they test themselves on the reading. This helps to clarify and solidify connections between lectures and readings.

   • The best part of the Test step is that it can be VERY BRIEF – and will be, as long as you’ve followed the PQRST process this far. And when it’s time to do a major review before an exam, you’ll be amazed at how much you already remember!