SQ3R  A Practical Guide

This guide was developed as a tool to assist students learning to use the SQ3R approach to reading. It is intended to be a hands-on exercise/guide in how the SQ3R system works as students become more familiar with it. [For students unfamiliar with SQ3R, a brief overview is included below.]

If you have questions during the process of using the system, consult with a campus resource familiar with learning or academic assistance. Also, keep in mind that while SQ3R is often helpful in improving students’ reading efficiency, it is a reading system and not a ‘speed-reading’ technique.

SQ3R

Survey  Question  Read  Recite  Review

Survey
You need to know the general picture of what is to be read before you can meaningfully understand and make intelligent decisions about the its details. Conduct a survey of reading assignments in order to get the best possible overall picture of what you are going to study (before you study it in any detail).

Question
Emphasizes importance of asking questions for learning. People seem to remember what they learn in answer to a question better than things just read or memorized. Questions give purpose to our learning.

Read
Read actively - read in order to answer the questions that have been raised in your mind.

Recite
Recitation is an effective device for learning while reading a book. The only way you can really find out what you have remembered and understood from your reading is to recite to yourself. To make sure that you understand and remember, you should stop periodically and try to recall to yourself what you have read.

Review
Review is a survey of what one has already studied.

Apply the following exercises to a book or textbook you are presently using (or plan to use).
Step A. SURVEY

The idea for conducting a survey is to prepare your brain to receive the information about to be read, and to increase your reading comprehension & efficiency. While a Survey takes time, it is a good investment for students using it by helping them to actively search for information instead of passively receiving it. This active process helps with information retention & reduces time spent later reviewing material. The following suggestions & activities are good guides for what you can do during the Survey phase of the SQ3R process. Give them a try.

✓ Consider items below that would apply to the reading you’re about to do (check boxes where applicable):

- How many pages are assigned? _________ (how much reading is this for you?)
  - Light
  - Average
  - Alot

- Rate how difficult the assigned reading will be:
  - Easy (it’s familiar; ‘light’ material; etc.)
  - Challenging (not too difficult but alot of pages; involves new material/concepts – reading it for the first time; etc.)
  - Difficult (difficult concepts; ‘thick’ material; it’s very confusing – will take time to grasp the material; etc.)

- Read the Preface to the book or text
  - This is where the author tells you why they wrote the book and why you should care;
  - Even if you don’t care yourself, your professor probably does (this can help you see how lectures and readings fit together, for example)

- Check out / skim the Chapter Summary
  - This can help in assessing how difficult the material might be;
  - How much do you know already … how much are you seeing for the first time?

- Scan the section Headings
  - What can you learn about how the material is organized, or about what concepts the author thinks are more or less important …
  - Do you agree with the author’s choices?

✓ Diagrams/Figures/Graphics:
  - What diagrams, figures or graphics would help you to remember material presented in lecture?
  - Copy particularly good examples to include with your notes (or to make notes on);
  - Create a list of important figures on a notecard (… this will save time searching for good information later)
Do you have to read it all??

- **Remember:** You don’t have to read the material in chronological order – you can **skip & move around – for example**, unlike a mystery novel that you would read from first to last page (avoiding the temptation to read the ending), go for it with a chapter or textbook - read the summary/conclusion first (to preview what you’re about to read);

- **Prioritize** your reading – survey the parts you may already know (or may have been discussed in lecture) and identify the parts that are really new to you (or may have been confusing in lecture). Make the new and/or confusing parts a priority and read them first (while your mind is focused and alert). Save the familiar material for later.

**Survey a Friend (or classmate):** Take **10 minutes** to ask a friend or classmate about which parts of the reading seem to be most important or what he/she knows about the material.

- Does your friend have an opinion on it? – do you agree or disagree? (about what?);
- Survey 2-3 people to get some ideas going for yourself – BEFORE doing any reading.

**Survey a Professor (or TA):** Even though it may feel uncomfortable, it is sometimes worthwhile to ask your professor (or TA) questions about the textbook and/or books selected for the course. **For example:**

- In your opinion, what are the strengths of this textbook [what topics or subject material does the author cover well (compared to other texts)];
- What topics or subject material are not covered so well? – will that be important for understanding course material or completing course expectations?

**Internet / www:** (Before reading) Go on-line and do a brief search for materials that summarize, critique or comment on your text, book(s) or assigned readings. Much like surveying a classmate, web searches can give you a general idea about important issues, questions and/or ideas concerned with your reading topic or reading material(s).

**Example:** if preparing to read a book on the Roman Emperors, see if you can find a chart summarizing the emperors (when they ruled, what they were each known for, etc.). This kind of quick overview will help make reading the course’s text more meaningful (and you can see if the author is in agreement with what you found on your web search).

**Please note:** On-line searches suggested here are intended as a stimulus option to give you a starting point for your own thinking on reading assignments/topics. It’s important not to cross the line into plagiarism - do to use the thinking / opinions of others as your own.

**Study Groups:** If you have a study group that can be relied upon, consider dividing especially long reading assignments up into smaller parts - with each member of the study group responsible for providing others with a summary of their part. Reading summaries can help students to decide what material to review or read in more detail later (for exams or papers).
Step B. QUESTION

Okay, so you’ve Surveyed the assigned reading text, books, etc. … what’s next? Time to get curious and write down some questions you would like to answer about your assigned readings or book.

✓ During your survey, what came up that made you curious about the reading assignment (or book)? List some questions that came to mind:

✓ Creating questions: Another way to create questions is to write down 3 of the section headings (from your textbook) and transform them into questions. For example, you could turn the heading “Stages of listening” into:

- What are the stages of listening?
- How many are there?
- Who came-up with the stages of listening?
- Why are the stages important?
- In what jobs would people need to know the stages of listening?

Exercise: In the space below, take some headings from your reading(s) and make up some questions that you find the answers to as you read:

1. 
   Question: 
   Question: 
   Question: 

2. 
   Question: 
   Question: 
   Question: 

3. 
   Question: 
   Question: 
   Question:
**Step C.**

READ

You are finally ready to actually read.

- Your goal at this point is to look for information in the readings that will enable you to answer the questions in part B.
- If you did your ‘homework’ in parts A & B, you’ll notice that not all of the pages in the assignment have to be read.
- You may also find that studying a good diagram or graphic is more helpful to you in understanding certain material (or answering a question) than what is written in the text.

- Answer 2 of the questions you created in part B.

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**Step D.**

RECITE

As you progress through your reading(s), it will be important to commit the material to memory in a way that is meaningful to you (and will help to refresh your memory later when reviewing). In this stage of SQ3R, your job is to see if you can put the reading(s) into your own words, and to understand the organization/flow of the reading material.

**Try the following: (give each only about 10-15 minutes of your time)**

Step 1: (Without looking) Recall as many of the main headings and/or principal ideas you read.

Step 2: (With a friend or on your own) Give a synopsis of your reading (this is much like giving a lecture).

Step 3: Go back to the reading and (on a note card) write down or information you struggled with or omitted [these notes will help you know what to re-read or review later when studying for an exam]

**Additional options for reciting material:**

- Work in study groups where you can test one another on main points and/or how material is organized;
- Pretend you are teaching a class on the chapter you just read –
  - What would be the important points to make?;
  - What would you say to students if you were the professor in charge of teaching this chapter?
- Create flash cards that outline important concepts on one side, and concepts you struggle with on the other.
- Draw diagrams or maps that help you understand connections between ideas/information.

**NOTE:** This part of SQ3R can often seem time consuming; keep in mind that what you do in this step can be the most important in helping make the reading material you read meaningful and more easily remembered for tests/papers. The time you put in now will save you time when preparing for tests – give it a try and see for yourself …
Step E. REVIEW

This is the easy part … you’ve already read the material and completed a lot of work to understand it in a way that makes sense to you; now, go over it again to freshen it in your mind (for a test or paper).

Below is a checklist of options for the Review process. Check-off the approaches you think will work for you (you may already use some with your current reading efforts):

☑ Off the top of your head (before reviewing) … create an outline (or conceptual map/drawing) of the material – take note of the parts you were pleased to have remembered or that you may have forgotten.

☑ Make a list of higher priority concepts / ideas that you may have to re-read (or discuss with your professor or study group).

☑ Re-read the preface, chapter introductions, and summaries.

☑ Review note cards / Quiz yourself.

☑ See if you can (still) answer questions created in step B (Question).

☑ Think critically – beyond remembering the material, consider:
  o How is information from different chapters somehow related?
  o How can material in the chapters be applied to examples in your own life (or the lives of friends)?
  o For what purpose is this material important? (why should you or others care?)

☑ Continue working in a study group to see how you & your peers understand the material similarly (or differently).

☑ Brush-up on the material - consult with your professor or TA on last time if you are still stuck on some concepts/material
  o Consider asking professors what helped them to understand the assigned material/readings when they were first learning it (as undergraduates).
    ▪ Did one of their professors give them a creative way of remembering or understanding it (?)
    ▪ Do they have their own way of understanding (or working with) the concepts/material (?)