

Learning From Textbooks



Students who learn successfully from textbooks usually engage in the following behaviours:

Pre-read the Chapter

Scan the chapter to get an overall sense of the main topic(s). Pay particular attention to chapter outlines and summaries, main headings and subheadings to create a picture of how the material is structured and to access your prior knowledge of the material. Build upon this initial knowledge while you read to increase comprehension.

Check for Comprehension

Break periodically from reading to determine whether or not you understand the material. The amount of reading completed before checking for comprehension depends on the complexity of the material, degree of familiarity with the material, or natural breaks in the text such as headings and/or sub-headings. Try to put what you have read into your own words or see if you can generate examples of the concepts in the text.

Look for Connections in the Chapter

Making connections between concepts in a chapter helps develop your ability to apply these concepts to more complex situations. These connections involve seeing the links between headings, sub-headings and concepts within the chapter. Ask yourself how the material "fits" together or how each concept relates to the heading that it is under.

Demonstrate a Sound Knowledge Base

It's one thing to think that you know and understand the text material and another to be able to prove it. Demonstrate that you know the information by creating and answering questions under the chapter headings and subheadings, or by answering questions from the study guide, from within the text, or from the end of the chapter.

LEARNING

DEVELOPMENT & SUCCESS



Students who learn successfully from textbooks usually *avoid* the following:

Reading Just to Get it Done

Some students read with the sole purpose of just getting it done. These students might sit for hours at a time trying to get through the chapter without really understanding or remembering the information. It is more efficient to gain an understanding of the material while you read, thereby avoiding having to re-read chapters that were not understood the first time.

Taking a Large Amount of Notes

Creating a large set of notes from your text is not only time intensive, but these notes may not be very helpful when it's time to study. If you choose to take notes from your text, use the headings and subheadings to organize key terms, keep them concise, and base them on your comprehension of the material rather than a verbatim account of the text. If you're not sure how to study effectively from your textbook, [meet with a Learning Development counsellor](#) to develop this skill.

Having Only One Approach to Readings

Different types of reading material require different approaches. Some readings might be very structured, while others may have little structure. Before you begin, think about your purpose for reading. Are you reading to gain a general understanding of an argument, to understand a character's development, or perhaps to gain knowledge of main ideas and supporting details? Each of these "purposes" requires you to think about and record the material in a different way.

Saving All of Their Readings until Right Before the Exam

Some students believe that saving all of their readings until the week before their exam will mean that they will remember the material better. It is difficult if not impossible to effectively learn and remember all of your course material the week before the exam. University exams require that you not only remember the information but that you also use what you have learned and apply it to new situations. It is better to build your knowledge base of the course material week-by-week than to try to memorize the material just before the exam.