

How to Read Textbooks

Before reading any text, read the table of contents, skim the preface, thumb through the entire book, and see what tools are at the end of the book.

To Read texts with headings and subheadings:

- Place an index card at the end of the chapter or as far as you want to read. The card provides a manageable goal.
- Read the *introduction* before the first heading and then look at all of the headings and subheadings throughout the chapter. Turn the *major headings into questions* and number them. Your goals are to construct a mental outline of the chapter and to provide focus for your readings. Also look at the graphics. Then read the *summary* so that you will recognize the main ideas in the chapter when you come to them.
- Return to the beginning of the chapter, read the first question and then underline the answer as you read. Use the subheadings to identify the parts of your answer. Reduce the answer to a number (such as “3 factors”) or a mnemonic device (such as “jel” for the judicial, executive, legislative branched of the government) and write this aid to memory under the heading. Repeat this process throughout the chapter.
- To review, return to the beginning of the chapter again, read the first question while you cover the text with a piece of paper and recite the answer out loud or write a brief outline of it. Repeat this process for each question. (This step should be done each time that you read a chapter, but realistically, students often do not have time for it. However, if you followed steps #1-#3 and do step #4 several times to prepare for an exam, your exam preparation will be much more effective.)

To read texts without headings and subheadings:

- The goals of this method are the same as those for texts with headings but the process differs somewhat. Placing an index card at the end of your selected text is still the first step, however.
- Read the first paragraph. Using the eraser end of a pencil to help you track, read the first few words of each paragraph until you identify the topic (a noun phrase) of the paragraph (such as “various methods for reading textbooks exist but...”). Read the last paragraph.
- With this outline in mind, read the chapter and underline main ideas.
- On the index card, write the major questions that this chapter answers and the “reduced” answer to question. Use this card for the review process.