

Reading To Comprehend And Learn

Reading A Paper or Chapter

PSQ5R is a formula that stands for the basic steps in learning from reading in an efficient manner. The P stands for Purpose, the S for Survey, the Q for Question, the 5 Rs for Read Selectively, Recite, Reduce-record, Reflect, and Review.

1. Purpose

Why are you reading this article or chapter, and what do you want to get out of it? When you have accomplished your purpose, stop reading. For instance, your purpose in seeking a number in the telephone book is specific and clear, and once you find the number, you stop "reading." Such "reading" is very rapid indeed, perhaps 100,000 words a minute! Perhaps it should be called by its proper name, "scanning", but when it suits your purpose, it is fast and efficient. This principle, of first establishing your purpose, whether to get the Focus or Theme, or main ideas, or main facts or figures, or evidence, arguments and examples, or relations, or methods, can prompt you to use a reading method that gets what you want in the minimum time.

2. Survey-Skim

Glance over the main features of the piece, that is, the title, the headings, the lead and summary paragraphs, to get an overview of the piece, to find out what ideas, problems and questions are being discussed. In doing this you should find the *Focus* of the piece, that is, the central theme or subject, what it is all about; and perhaps the *Perspective*, that is, the approach or manner in which the author treats the theme. This survey should be carried out in no more than a minute or two.

3. Question

Compose questions that you aim to answer:

1. What do I already know about this topic? - in other words, activate prior knowledge.
2. Turn the first heading into a question, to which you will be seeking the answer when you read. For example: "What were 'the effects of the Hundred Years' War'?" - and you might add "on democracy, or on the economy"? Or "What is 'the impact of unions on wages'?"

4. Read Selectively

Read to find the answers to your question. By reading the first sentence of each paragraph you may well get the answers. Sometimes the text will "list" the answers by saying "The first point.... Secondly...." and so on. And in some cases you may have to read each paragraph carefully just to

understand the next one, and to find the Focus or main idea buried in it. In general, look for the ideas, information, evidence, etc., that will meet your purpose.

5. Recite

Without looking at the book, recite the answers to the question, using your own words as much as possible. If you cannot do it reasonably well, look over that section again.

6. Reduce-Record

Make a brief outline of the question and your answers. The answers should be in key words or phrases, not long sentences. For example, "Effects of 100 Yrs' War? - consolidate Fr. King's power, Engl. off continent". Or, "Unions on Wages? - Uncertain, maybe 10-15%".

7. Reflect

Recent work in cognitive psychology indicates that comprehension and retention are increased when you "elaborate" new information. This is to reflect on it, to turn it this way and that, to compare and make categories, to relate one part with another, to connect it with your other knowledge and personal experience, and in general to organize and reorganize it. This may be done in your mind's eye, and sometimes on paper. Sometimes you will at this point elaborate the outline of step 6, and perhaps reorganize it into a standard outline, a hierarchy, a table, a flow diagram, a map, or even a "doodle." Then you go through the same process, steps 3 to 7, with the next section, and so on.

8. Review

Survey your "reduced" notes of the paper or chapter to see them as a whole. This may suggest some kind of overall organization that pulls it all together. Then recite, using the questions or other cues as starters or stimuli for recall. This latter kind of recitation can be carried out in a few minutes, and should be done every week or two with important material.

Reading Books

In reading books, there are several stages to go through, and one must make a judgment at the end of each stage. The question to answer is "Have I gone far enough to achieve my purpose?" If you have, STOP. If not, go on. STEPS:

- Note who the author is, and the date of publication. Read preface and table of contents. Look at the diagrams and pictures.
- Skim read the first and last chapters. Frequently these are introductory and summary chapters, and may give you all the information you need.
- Read the first and last chapters and skim the intervening chapters. This takes you into the book in greater depth, and allows you to decide which, if any, of the intervening chapters you

should read.

- Read intervening chapters as demanded by your purpose.
- Go into the glossary, index, and appendices as needed.

Skimming and selective reading are speedy and efficient techniques for getting *what you need* out of books and articles. Many students think it is cheating not to read every word in a book. Not so. You are cheating yourself when you waste time reading material not essential to your purpose.