

Reading Your Textbook

Knowing how to read and understand your textbook is one of the best ways to do well in college.

What is a textbook?

A textbook is book used in schools or colleges for the formal study of a subject. A textbook contain facts and ideas around a certain subject.

What's the big deal about reading a textbook?

Textbooks are not like other books, as they are organized in a specific way and the information is presented in an organized and purposeful fashion. There is a lot of information packed into every paragraph, the sentence structure is often complex and usually there are a lot of new vocabulary words. But with a few tips, you can conquer this challenge and have a real advantage in your classes.

Why should I read my textbook?

Your textbooks are an important tool in college learning. Your textbooks can help you in many ways:

- Prepare for a class or lecture so you won't feel overwhelmed by so many new ideas.
- Provide pictures and graphs that make learning more interesting.
- Give practice questions and problems that can help you know what to study.
- Review at your own pace, unlike a lecture.

Why should I know the parts of a textbook?

Knowing the different parts of a textbook and their purpose will help you read a textbook effectively and efficiently. Since most textbooks are designed similarly, becoming familiar with how a textbook is organized and presented the material becomes straightforward. By knowing the parts of a textbook you will be able to find information more easily, understand the material better, and remember what you have read for a longer period of time.

How should I read a textbook?

Have a plan. Plan how much you have to read and the purpose of your reading. Multiply the number of pages you have to read by 5 minutes. That is the amount of time the average college student needs to spend on a reading assignment. It's also a good idea to break information down in chunks. Too much reading at once doesn't allow the brain to let new information sink in. That is why textbooks are organized in chapters and sections. Be sure to also take breaks. Every 20 minutes is a recommended.

Parts of a Textbook and Reading Tips

- ❖ **Title and picture on cover** - The *title* provides you with the subject of the book. The *picture* on the cover provides more information about the subject, and offers clues about what will be covered in the book.
 - **Reading Tip:** *Take a look at the title and any picture on the cover together. Both will help you get the bigger "picture" of what you will learn.*
- ❖ **Table of contents**- Usually the table of contents is found at the front of the book. Each topic is in an outline form divided by sections and gives the page number of where this sections begins.
 - **Reading Tip:** *Take your time to read through the table of contents, as it will provide you with a good overview of what you will learn.*

- ❖ **Chapter headings and Introductions-** Chapter headings and introductions are found at the beginning of each chapter. The chapter heading is a word or a phrase that provides you with a title. There may be also *Learning Objectives* directly under each chapter heading. These are points that not only outline the rest of the chapter but tell you exactly what you should learn from reading this section. The introduction usually comes right after the chapter title and is where the author introduces topic.
 - **Reading Tip:** *Learning objectives tell you what you should learn after you have read this section. Make it a point to learn this information.*
- ❖ **Main Heading and Subheadings-** Main headings and subheadings are short words or phrases that break up each chapter or section into chunks of information. These headings are useful because they break up information into chunks, letting the reader know what to expect in each section.
 - **Reading Tip:** *Skimming the headings help see the big picture of that chapter.*
- ❖ **Pictures, Charts and Graphs-** Images and graphics are used to help make a point, create interest, and make a text more easily understood. Pictures represent big ideas and make it easier for the reader to understand what the author is talking about. So don't ignore these visuals as they are useful to a reader.
 - **Reading Tip:** *When you are reading a section in your textbook yourself are there pictures, graphs, tables, charts, timelines? If so take a few minutes to look at them closely.*
- ❖ **Chapter and Section Summary-** These summaries are the author's review of the main points of a section or chapter showing you the important ideas. The section or chapter summary is usually found at the end of a section or chapter. This is where the written the most important information is told in a few sentences. If you didn't understand that point or missed it while you were reading the chapter, definitely read it now and make sure you understand it.
 - **Reading Tip:** *Reading the section summary before reading the chapter can help understand the material easier because your mind knows what to expect.*
- ❖ **Glossary-** Glossary is the textbook's dictionary of terms about the subject you are reading about. In the glossary you will find important words about your subject. The terms are listed in alphabetical order followed by their definitions. This vocabulary list can be found at the beginning or at end of a section or chapter. These words may be in bold and italicized.
 - **Reading Tip:** *Understanding what particular words mean has a lot to do with overall reading comprehension so be sure to understand any vocabulary words listed.*
- ❖ **Index-** An index is a list of topics covered in the textbook in alphabetical order. Each topic is followed by the page number where you can find each item in the textbook. A similar topic can be in different parts of the textbook. By reading how they relate in each section you can improve your understanding of that topic.
 - **Reading Tip:** *When you want to find something fast, check the index.*