



## Reading Textbooks

You might find yourself looking at your textbooks, bewildered about how to get started or without a plan to make sure you make the most of your studying time. If you do, don't worry! Research shows that a few active reading strategies can help!

First, make sure you've set aside enough time for reading: make sure you have at least 5 minutes per page and plan to study in short, 5–10-page chunks at a time.

Before you read:

- Preview the material: look through the chapter to see if you can find clues about the main concepts and elements. Look for:
  - Titles, headings, and subtitles
  - Illustrations or other visuals
  - Vocabulary lists or glossaries of important terms
  - Chapter summaries
  - Introductory outlines or guides
  - Practice questions
  - Any special boxes or graphics that might help you relate the material to the real world.
  - If your textbook is digital, make sure you know what features it has, how to navigate it, and if there are any special digital features (like quizzes) that you can do.
- Start at the end: read the summary, vocabulary lists, and chapter questions to give yourself a sense of what the most important ideas/aspects of the chapter will be.
- Check in with what you already know: write down anything you've already learned about the topic and make a list of any questions you might have.
- Figure out your purpose: most instructors don't assign reading just to keep you busy – they assign it because they think the material is valuable. Try to see if you can figure out what your instructor wants you to take away from the reading.

While you read:

- Focus on the first sentence of each paragraph – this is often where you’ll find the main idea.
- Use questions to find answers: try converting statements into questions
  - Ex: the statement “there are five stages of cell division” in your textbook can become “what are the five stages of cell division?”.
- Read the section completely before you make notes, then try to take notes from memory. Once you’re done, use the textbook to make sure you have the information you need.
- Try guessing what questions your instructor might ask on an exam and write the down.
- Before you start your reading for the next week of class, see if you can still answer these questions. This will help your long-term memory.

When you’re done:

- After your next class, come back to the chapter and see how what you read connects with what you learned in class.
- Try to organize your thoughts with a mind map or concept map. You can do this by hand, or you can use some of the excellent mind mapping software out there.
  - Map or write down everything you can before you go back to your textbook or lecture notes. Only use these to fill in the gaps left after you’ve tried your hardest.

For information about what each section of your textbook is doing, please see our “Features of a Textbook” handout, available [here](#).