



READING TO LEARN

Do you ever find yourself bored by what you are reading or feeling overwhelmed by all the information? *Survey!*

Just like you read the playbill before a play to see who the characters are and where the different scenes take place, you can survey everything you read for better comprehension. When watching a play or reading a novel, if you know the main characters and the story line, it is much easier to understand what is going on because you look for the different characters and can anticipate the plot. As a result, you remember more details because you aren't spending all your time trying to figure out who the characters are and what they are doing. Similarly, if you survey your text before reading each chapter, you will have key terms and ideas in your mind before you even begin to read. Doing this is almost like creating a mini filing cabinet in your head, giving yourself a place to store the information in an organized way that will lead to better understanding and recall.

Survey by:

Familiarizing yourself with the overall content and organization of the material.

- Read the title, author's name, and introduction (and any paragraphs that say "in this chapter you will learn about..")
- Read the headings and subheadings and the first sentence under each heading
- Notice any typographical aids such as italics, bold words, marginal notes or definitions, colored ink, underlining, and enumeration, and skim this information
- Look at any graphs or pictures (or do this in a separate step—see below)
- Read the summary and any lists of definitions or questions at the end
- Think of some questions about the material that you are wondering about.

Surveying does not need to take longer than 10 or 15 minutes, depending on the depth of surveying you do. However long you take to do it, you will remember more and better understand the material. For example, if you read the term "partial-reinforcement effect" or "Weber's Law" in a list of important words at the end of a chapter, when you see that term in the text you will spot it and look for the definition, remembering this information better because it was something you were looking for, and not something that was looking for you. Surveying also helps you later distinguish and highlight the most important information.

Do you tend to skip over graphs and diagrams to make the reading go faster?

Although this does make your reading go faster, the information in these charts is usually crucial to your reading comprehension. If you find yourself doing this, try skimming the chapter a second time just to look at all the graphs, charts, and diagrams before you read. It is interesting to try to figure these pictures out at this point in your reading, and again, it makes it much easier when you actually go to read the chapter because you have already been exposed to the ideas in a few different ways.

Do you ever find yourself suddenly at the bottom of a page or paragraph and you don't remember a thing you read? *Question!*

- Question generate as you read. Write headings, subheadings, and definitions in the form of a question in the margin.

For example, if a section is labeled *Classical Conditioning*, write *What is Classical Conditioning?* and *Who was Pavlov?* in the margin next to the text. Abbreviate if possible: *? Pavlov*, or *? diff. between classical & instr. cond.?* Writing questions as you read forces you to remain attentive to what you are learning and also helps you to always be thinking in terms of questions and answers, and not just trying to remember answers. Try to write questions that go beyond just basic definitions and *what, when, where, who* questions. *Why* and *how* questions take you a step beyond memorization to a better understanding of the material. Any questions in your book are great study tools because the answers are right there so you can cover the text and ask yourself the questions when you study. If you prefer, however, you can write the questions in your notebook. (For more information about question generating, see separate handout, under *notetaking*)

- After reading each section or paragraph, stop and ask yourself specific questions about the material. See if you can restate what you just read in your own words. If you cannot, then you can go back right away and clarify what you don't remember or understand. It is a good test to see how much you are absorbing to stop yourself at the bottom of each page and ask yourself to summarize what that page was about.

Do you have a hard time distinguishing between important and not-so-important ideas and themes when you study? *Underline* or *highlight!*

Underline or highlight key ideas as you read, and try to understand the relationship of these key ideas to the section heading or subheading. These key ideas are often in bold print or labeled in the heading, or set apart with key phrases like "the most important development" or "the biggest contribution" or "a key equation." Watch for these words as you read and highlight. Be careful that you don't highlight too much, however—sometimes when you highlight it is easy to mark the whole page and stop distinguishing between primary and secondary information. The action of highlighting tells you that you will read the information later so sometimes you stop reading and just keep painting until you get to the end of the sentence.

Do you feel like you highlight too much?

If you think you highlight too much (a neon page or even half-page *is* too much), try surveying the chapter a little more so you are more familiar with the key terms, topics, and ideas. Also utilize question generating to keep you more actively reading. Try other ways of marking your book: use asterisks, circles, stars, or numbers for a sequence of points. You can also

create your own key for writing in the margin: try writing a **D** next to definitions, a **P** next to information about a person, or an **E** next to an equation.

Do you like to take notes as you read?

Write down the chapter headings and subheadings in your notebook and write down key definitions and ideas from each section. Make sure you are not just copying the information, but that you are actively thinking and questioning yourself as you write. This way you do not really need to go back and read the entire chapter—you can just review your notes and the questions you wrote down.

Do you sometimes feel that your mind is like a sieve?

When you reach the end of the chapter, take a minute and reread the questions and the summary provided by the author. Flip through the chapter and read the questions you wrote in the margin and study the markings you made. After you close your book or stop reading, ask yourself to recall the different ideas and definitions you read about. If you can remember a key term but can't remember the definition, look it up immediately while the chapter is still fresh in your mind.

One Last Point: Beware of negative self-talk. It does you no good to tell yourself as you are reading how the material is difficult or boring--you will not remember what you have read if you are thinking such negative thoughts. Instead try to always develop curiosity about what you are reading; get excited about learning new things.

Remember that the most valuable way to read a chapter is to read it well the first time. Don't kid yourself into thinking that you will go back and read it again later, unless you have the time and know you will actually do it. It is often helpful to survey and skim the chapter before the appropriate lecture, and then go back and read the full chapter after the professor has given you some notes on the subject.

What are my biggest challenges in reading?

What are some of my own reading strategies?

What new strategies do I think will help me the most?