The “PQRST METHOD” of Reading a Textbook

The “PQRST” method is a step-by-step plan that has been proven to raise test scores for students who follow the steps involved.

“P”=PREVIEW—THE FIRST STEP—Getting the big, overall picture.

If you perform this step correctly, you will get a general picture and see the main ideas the author is trying to get across. Knowing this ahead of time, you will be able to look for and recognize the most important points when you do read for details. You won’t waste time stumbling through your book and finding a starting point.

What to preview when you first get your book at the beginning of the semester:

• look at the title page and carefully read the introductory material. The introduction gives you an idea of the purpose of the book and its special features.
• Preview the table of contents. You’ll see how the book is organized, and it can often give you a preview of the chapters to come.
• The back part of the book often has the appendix (supplementary material), the glossary (a mini-dictionary), references or bibliography (often valuable if you have to write a research paper or speech), and the index (the alphabetical listing of important names, terms, events, etc. found throughout the textbook).
• You will be glad later that you know these helpful parts are there for you when you need them.

What to preview—when you open your book to start a new chapter, read the...

• title of the chapter
• chapter objectives
• visual aids (graphs, pictures, etc. that give you a general idea of the chapter content)
• headings and subheadings (usually in bold and/or larger print or in italics)
• chapter introduction
• notes in the margins
• terminology
• chapter study questions
• chapter summary

“Q”—QUESTION—THE SECOND STEP—Gives you a purpose for reading, reading to answer your questions.

- This is a step that you actually do while previewing.
- Formulate a question for each chapter title, heading or subheading in the chapter.
- Use the standard who, what, why, which, when, where or how.

“R”—READ—THE THIRD STEP—Read carefully and react to what you read.

- Reading is also a thinking process.
- After you’ve read a paragraph—or as you get better at this—read a section at a time; then stop and think about what you have just read.
- Ask yourself questions such as, “
  - What was the main point there?
  - What details are important to know?”
- So read a section, stop and think about the section, and ask questions of yourself about it.
- Your mind is not going to soak up that knowledge without effort on your part.

“S”—STATE—THE FOURTH STEP—This pretty much guarantees comprehension, helps to put what you’re learning into long-term memory, and avoids passive reading on your part.

How to do it?

- After you’ve read a paragraph; stop, look away, and say in your own words what you just read.
- If you can express the author’s ideas in your own words, you can feel comfortable that you understand what you just read and can put the information to use. If you cannot, you need to go back and read it again with more focus and concentration. Then do the STATE step again.
- It is important to state out loud. This provides another sensory input for the memory process. Some students, who are good at rote memory, can pretty much say verbatim what they just read and be quite accurate. Parrots can do this too but there is no comprehension involved. When you put into your own words what you read, try to think how the concept(s) apply to situations and even to possible test questions.
• You will get more efficient at this the more you do this step. At first, try just a paragraph and as you get better at it (and it really does not take up much time), you can lengthen out to a section/passage at a time.
“T” — TEST — THE FIFTH STEP — A shortened run-through of the STATE step, done later for purposes of review.

- Sometime after your first reading of the material, you will want to check yourself to see if you recall what was in it and what the important concepts were.
- How do I do this?
  - As you review, go back and look at notes you made in the margins and in the text, look at the headings, etc. (things you did during the first reading).
  - Try to reconstruct the material you identified as important.
  - Can you recall it?
- This review should once again be done in a reflective manner —
  - don’t just move your eyes over the material.
  - Memory doesn’t just happen because your eyes moved over it two or three times.
  - You need to react and actively think about it.
- If you perform this TEST step accurately, you will have converted what you have studied from your short-term memory into long-term learning.

SO WHAT CAN I DO IF I NEED MORE HELP THAN WHAT I’VE JUST READ HERE?

The staff in the Staton Center for Learning Enrichment have more information and tips to share. Just let them know.