Effective Textbook Reading

You can be a more effective reader by learning to be an active reader. Being an active reader will help you better recall and understand what you have read.

Once you have your textbook, take some time to flip through it and see how it’s set up. It’s like getting a toolbox, and opening it up to see what tools you have to use.

Then, when you’re ready to start a reading assignment, be clear about your purpose: “What am I trying to learn or do with this material?” This will keep your brain engaged.

The steps of active reading are: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Relate, Review.

1. **SURVEY**
   This step gives you a preview of the material you’re about to read, preparing your brain to learn new information.
   - Read titles, headings and subheadings
   - Notice words that are **bolded** or *in italics*
   - Look at pictures and captions
   - Read any charts, maps or graphics
   - Read the chapter introduction and objectives
   - Read the chapter summary
   - Think about what you already know about the topics

2. **QUESTION**
   This step focuses your reading on what you need to do with the material. Create a series of questions you need to answer by reading. You can:
   - Use the learning objectives at the beginning of the chapter or that your instructor has given you
   - Use any assignments or questions based on the reading
   - Use the review questions at the end of the chapter
   - Turn chapter headings and subheadings into questions (example: “The Health Care Team” → “Who is the health care team?” “Why is the health care team important?”)
     - Some students use these questions to structure their notes

3. **READ**
   Read the passage *quickly*:
   - Don’t take notes or highlight
   - Don’t read anything more than once, even if you don’t understand it at first
   - As you read, try to find answers to your questions from Step 2
• Answer questions in your head and check your answers before continuing

4. RECITE
Check and record your learning.
• Take notes in your own words on paper or in your book
• Underline or highlight the important parts
• Create a mindmap or outline
• Answer questions out loud (activates different parts of your brain/form stronger memories)
• Go back to sections you didn’t understand to find the answers to questions

5. RELATE
You’re more likely to remember information that connects to what you already know.
Connect to:
• What you’ve learned previously
• Your life experience
• Your career goal — why would this information be important on the job?

6. REVIEW
• Close the book and attempt to recall what you’ve just read.
• Write a summary of your reading.
• Answer the questions you created again without looking at your notes or the book.

FINAL TIPS:
• Break your reading up into manageable chunks. It might be by chapter, section, or page.
• Give yourself sufficient mental breaks every 45-60 minutes.
• Modify the steps to better fit your needs once you’ve gained some practice with active reading strategies.
• Test yourself on material regularly to ensure that information is transferring to your long-term memory.
  o Example: practice recalling information from your reading the following day for 10-15 minutes, then spend 10 minutes recalling two days after, 10 minutes four days after, then another 10 minutes 8 days after.