

# SQ4R STUDY-READING STRATEGY

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## What is SQ4R?

SQ4R is a study-reading system to improve reading efficiency and comprehension. Reading itself is a short-term memory operation and therefore if you are only reading for classes, you are not actually studying.

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## Why should you try SQ4R?

If reading your texts causes you to fall asleep, lose concentration, frequently re-read the same page, or simply not recall what you have read, study reading strategies like SQ4R may help.

Many study-reading systems and their parts have been tested to find out if students benefit from using them. The results of such research suggest that students who are taught to use a study-reading system understand and remember much better than other students.

One major way to learn is through repetition and study-reading systems provide a meaningful and active repetition necessary to ensure learning. The multiple steps in a study reading system provide four or five encounters with each main idea compared with the usual once-through approach to reading a textbook assignment. Study-reading is much more intense and produces much more reinforcement and learning.

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## Research on SQ4R

One study examined the comprehension and reading rate of a group of college students were measured before and after learning and using these strategies and showed an average reading rate increase of 22% and improved comprehension by 10%. Another study considered a group of upperclassmen at a major university who learned SQ4R and used it for a full semester. At the end of the semester, every student in the study had a higher GPA, faster reading rate, improved comprehension and, on the average, spent 30% less time on studying than before!

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## Psychology of SQ4R

Study reading systems have many psychological advantages over ordinary reading:

1. The pre-reading step give you a mental organization or structure-- you know what to expect.
2. You are always looking for something specific, rather than wandering aimlessly down a page.
3. When you find the information you are seeking, you will feel real accomplishment.
4. When you are able to recall information in the recall steps, you will feel secure in what you have learned.
5. Study-reading systems use multiple sensory inputs to learn. You will see, say, hear, and write as you move through each section of your text. The more senses you use, the more deeply you concentrate and learn the material.

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## How to use SQ4R

There are many variations to the system. All are very similar, providing an initial overview of the material, a purpose-setting step, intensive reading, followed by immediate and later memory checks.

In SQ4R you will Survey, Question, Read, Recite, "Rite", and Review

**S- Survey:** Determine the organization of and preview what's coming, "X-ray" the "bones" of the reading:

- Look at and think about the title; what do you already know about this?
- Read the introduction and summary (or first two and last two paragraphs)
- Look over each page's headings, sub-headings, boldface, titles of graphs, charts, etc.
- Take no more than 5 minutes to survey an average chapter

**Q- Question:** Set a purpose for reading and to get actively involved in reading:

- Pose a question, mentally or in writing, before you read the first section of the chapter
- If available, use questions provided by the professor, your text or a study guide
- Or turn a chapter heading, sub-heading, or boldface term into a question, using "who, what, where, when, how?" (example: Heading= The Treaty of Versailles: possible questions= When was it signed? Who signed it? What were the important terms?)

**R- Read:** Read to find the answer to the question you posed in Step Q and other key ideas:

- Read only a short section, one paragraph to one page, depending on difficulty
- Read quickly and selectively, improving your comprehension by seeking an answer to your question and other important information in this section
- Then proceed to the recite and "rite" steps (see below) before reading further
- Continually changing pace as you read one short section-- from question to read to recite to "rite"-- prevents boredom, enhances concentration, and brings far greater learning than the usual reading of a full chapter.

**R- Recite:** Find out what you have gained from reading a section:

- Answer your question aloud, in your own words, for an immediate self-test of comprehension
- If you can't say it, you don't know it!
- Reciting is your most powerful tool for remembering information; it requires the complete, multi-sensory concentration needed to move information from short- to long-term memory

**R- "Rite":** Prepare your text for later review, follow Recite with any of these steps:

- If the material is fairly easy, underline or highlight, using the "telegrammatic" system (see below)
- If it is detailed or complex, make very brief notes in the margin or in your notebook
- In either case, record key names, dates, terms and definitions
- Mark any confusing portions so you can ask the professor, TA, or tutor for clarification

**Now move to the next section of text. Return to the "Question" step and proceed through "Read," "Recite," and "Rite."**

**R- Review:** At the end of the chapter, do an immediate, brief review to double retention. To cut total study time before a test, add later, brief reviews:

- Take about 5 minutes to review the full chapter, "re-surveying" it by again looking over all headings, sub-headings, and boldface-- adding your own notes, highlighting, or underlining.
- A week later, review again briefly to strengthen long-term memory
- Review again each week until you are tested, adding new chapters as assigned

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## Telegrammatic Highlighting

In the "Rite" step of SQ4R, you may choose to underline, highlight, take marginal notes, or outline a reading. Difficult texts or those you must know in great detail may demand marginal notes or outlines, but underlining and highlighting work well for easier or more general material. To improve comprehension and prepare for effective review, avoid random marking. Instead, use the "telegrammatic" technique

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### The Objective:

Your underlined or highlighted words should give you a sufficient, correct summary of the material. The model is a telegram, that old-fashioned, pre-telephone and pre-email form of communication. Because the sender pays for a telegram by the word, a message is reduced to the bare essentials.

*By phone, you might call a friend to say, "Hi, I'll be in San Antonio this weekend for a conference. Can we get together and catch up on all the news? I'll be staying at the Menger Hotel from Thursday evening through Sunday afternoon. I can't wait to fill you in on...."*

*By telegram, you might say "At San Antonio Menger Thursday to Sunday. Call me."*

The phone call uses 43 words and the telegram uses only 9.  
The telegram is your model for effective underlining or highlighting.

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## Telegrammatic Highlighting Example

Read aloud only the underlined words in Example A.

Since the retina is the sensitive organ for seeing, it deserves closer attention than the other structures of the eye. If we examine it with a microscope, we can see that it is made up of extremely tiny cells of two basic types - rods and cones. The rods are cylindrical in shape, but the cones are rather tapered. Our best estimate is that the eye contains between 110,000,000 and 125,000,000 rods and between 6,300,000 and 6,800,000 cones. This tremendous number of rods and cones, however, does not spread uniformly over the entire retina. Rather the cones are most numerous in a highly specialized region of the retina known as the fovea, and the rods occur most frequently about 20 degrees away from the fovea. The fovea is a slightly depressed area of the retina.

Read aloud only the underlined words in Example B.

Since the retina is the sensitive organ for seeing, it deserves closer attention than the other structures of the eye. If we examine it with a microscope, we can see that it is made up of extremely tiny cells of two basic types - rods and cones. The rods are cylindrical in shape, but the cones are rather tapered. Our best estimate is that the eye contains between 110,000,000 and 125,000,000 rods and between 6,300,000 and 6,800,000 cones. This tremendous number of rods and cones, however, does not spread uniformly over the entire retina. Rather the cones are most numerous in a highly specialized region of the retina known as the fovea, and the rods occur most frequently about 20 degrees away from the fovea. The fovea is a slightly depressed area of the retina.

Imagine you are reviewing this reading before a quiz or exam.

- Which of these examples would give you the sufficient, complete summary of the material?
- Which one "sends you a telegram?"

Keep this model of a telegram in mind as you underline or highlight. You'll need to think a bit more, but that helps you focus intently on the information as you underling or highlight, improving both comprehension and later review and recall.