



Office of Learning Resources

University of Pennsylvania
Suite 300, Stouffer Commons
3702 Spruce Street
57-EXCEL (3-9235)
lrcmail@pobox.upenn.edu
<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc>

How Will I Learn All of this Information?

Textbooks often contain so much information that learning and remembering it all can be a daunting task. In addition to the large quantity of new ideas and concepts, these textbooks are often written in the jargon or technical language of the discipline. For this reason, we describe them as “dense textbooks.” Even for the most diligent students, preparing for an exam or quiz on just a few chapters from this type of textbook can seem overwhelming.

Using a system of creating questions to guide you through the reading will help you to comprehend and retain information as you read. When you are through, you will be left with a study guide for exam preparation.

Don’t feel as though you should rush through a chapter in a dense textbook. Take your time and learn as you read. If you do this from the first day, you will be better prepared for class and should actually need less time to study for exams.

Survey the assigned reading, skimming through chapter headings, diagrams, questions and summaries. Alongside the chapter and section headings, or on a separate sheet of paper, turn the heading into a question. For example, “Measuring and Comparing the Volumes of Reacting Gases” can become “How do I measure and compare the volumes of reacting gases?” If there are no headings, break the chapter into sections and number each section, then create your question as you read. As you read, you’ll have a sense of what topics are important. For instance, for a chapter entitled “The Tradeoffs Between Inflation and Unemployment” an initial question might be “What are the tradeoffs and how does this effect the economy?”

Read in chunks of only a few paragraphs at a time. Try to summarize what the author is saying and jot down what you have learned after reading each chunk. Write these notes in the margins so that you can use them to guide your reading when you review for an exam.

Write out the answers to each of the questions you created from the headings after you have read to the end of the chapter.

Review the entire chapter by reading the questions, checking your answers, and rewriting them if you need to.

Take time to review and reflect. Think about the new information, trying to find ways to categorize and connect the material to other topics in the course, as well as other chapters in the book or class lectures. Write down additional questions that may occur to you as you reflect on the new material. Clarify anything that is confusing; write yourself a note so you can take your questions to class, or to a peer, a tutor, or the instructor. Finding the answers to your questions early will help you understand as you go along.

To discuss your particular concerns with reading, or to develop more effective reading strategies, make an appointment with a Learning Instructor today!