



Welcome to Active Reading—Getting the most out of your text!  
Let's begin.

## WHAT IS ACTIVE READING?

*Reading with an awareness of  
a  
purpose for reading*

- ◉ Requires you to think about what you're reading
- ◉ A continuous attempt to understand and relate information
- ◉ Asking questions of the text

You are probably wondering what exactly is meant by the term “active reading”. Well, simply put, active reading can be described as “reading with an awareness of a purpose for reading”.

When you are reading actively, you are engaged in the material, thinking about the information you are trying to take in. You are making a conscious and continuous effort to understanding the material you are reading and to relate it to other information or knowledge you already have.

You are also engaged in an on-going process of asking questions of the material you are reading, and seeking answers to questions that you may have already had about the topic.

## PQ4R—A METHOD FOR READING ACTIVELY

- P - Preview
- Q - Question
- R - Read
- R - Reflect
- R - Recite
- R - Review

PQ4R is one effective method for teaching yourself how to read actively and get the most out of your textual material.

P stands for Preview, Q for question, and the 4 R's: Read, Reflect, Recite, Review. Lets examine these steps in more detail.

## PREVIEW

- ◉ Becoming familiar with the chapter
- ◉ Take into account headings, subheadings, introductions, summaries, any key terms
- ◉ Note any questions you may initially have about the material (there should be some!)

Previewing:

Previewing is the first step to our active reading method.

While previewing a chapter, skim through the chapter, making note of section headings and subheadings, and bolded or italicized terminology. Also take this opportunity to skim through the chapter introduction, as well as the chapter summary—if there is one.

If there are no headings in your books, read the first and last sentence of your chapter, or paragraphs within the chapter.

The purpose of previewing your chapter is to familiarize yourself with the material you are about to learn, and to develop questions on the topic—you should have some questions, especially if you're staying on top of things and reading the chapter *before* your lectures.

## QUESTION

- ◉ What do you want to know about the material?
- ◉ What is unfamiliar to you?
- ◉ Try using the headings to generate questions
- ◉ Use the questions at the close of the chapter
- ◉ Try to develop higher order questions

After you've previewed the chapter you are about to read, take a few moments to record the questions you have on a sheet of paper. What is it that you want to know about this material? What was unfamiliar to you about the topic—perhaps there were a number of unfamiliar key terms.

A simple way to begin developing questions about the material is to use the chapter headings and subheadings as a stepping stone, or to use chapter summary questions to get you started. For example, if a heading in your chapter reads: "Three Options: Militarism, Pacifism, and Defence" an easy question to get you started might be "what is Pacifism?". While this is a good start, you should be trying to engage the material even more....for example, a higher order question using the same chapter heading might be "how does Pacifism differ from Militarism?" or "In what socio-political situations has Pacifism been implemented?" "What aspects of Militarism make it a more viable option in the eyes of those who adhere to this ethical principle"

As you can see, the more detailed or challenging questions will require you to think about the material more in order to find an answer to your question. This will help you maintain your focus.

## READING & REFLECTING

### ◉ READ:

- Try to select out main ideas and themes
- Also note key examples
- What is discussed in great detail?
- Don't be overly concerned with the speed of your reading

### ◉ REFLECT:

- Answer the questions you developed during the Preview section
- Try to create your own examples—integrate the material into your life for longer memory
- Connect any new information to things you have already learned in the course
  - ◉ Does the new info support previous learning?
  - ◉ Is there a contradiction?

Now that you've previewed the chapter, and taken some time to develop some well thought out questions on the material it's time to actually get the reading underway! While reading your chapter, try to focus in on the main ideas and themes that are being presented. Pay attention to the examples that the text offers.

Once you have completed your chapter, or the section of the chapter that you've set out to read, take some time to reflect on the information that you've acquired. Look to the questions that you created during the preview section of your study session and take some time to answer them as best you can.

Think back to the examples that were presented to you throughout the chapter and try to see if you can come up with your own examples to test your understanding of the material. The more personal an example you can come up with the better you will do at integrating the new information into your memory for greater recall when it comes time to be tested. Also take some time to try and make connections between the new information, and information you already have on this material—how does what you just learned fit with what you learned in previous chapters or lectures? Does it support your previous knowledge, or are there aspects that contradict? If so, why do you think that might be? This process can also help you to develop some well-thought out questions for your next lecture!

## RECITING & REVIEW

### ◉ RECITE:

- Can you answer any of your initial questions? Check after each section.

### ◉ REVIEW:

- Review will help to monitor where there are gaps in your learning
- Reviewing early will save you time during exams
- Attempt to answer your questions again a day or two after your initial reading.
  - ◉ Can you still do it without looking to the book?

Before continuing on to the recitation portion of your study session, take a well-deserved break—10 to 15 minutes should do. When you sit down again, take up to five minutes, and without referring to your text book or to your notes, write down everything that you remember. This can be done in point form if you'd prefer, or in paragraph form. Once you've done this, compare your recitation notes to your text book—was there anything that you forgot?

Finally, review is an essential part in recalling information in the future. It is essential that regular reviewing becomes a part of your daily and weekly study regime, as this will save you time when it comes to preparing for exams. Keep your questions written out, and return to them a day or two after you've read your chapter. Are you still able to answer them?

Constant review will also point out gaps in your understanding, allowing you to return to material to go over difficult concepts long before final exam panic sets in. The review portion of your study session should only take from 10 to 30 minutes.

## TAKING NOTE

- ◉ Read first, take notes later
- ◉ Try to identify the main point in a paragraph
- ◉ Include an example, but don't include all 7!
- ◉ Keep a glossary
- ◉ Include diagrams when helpful
- ◉ Keep your notes organized!

Although we've spent a lot of time discussing active reading, and the PQ4R method, it is also essential to take useful and well thought out notes during your study sessions. Many of us will sit down to read a chapter, and highlight away, or write down each statement that seems important immediately after reading it. We feel like this is saving us time. In the long run, however, this method actually leaves us with a pile of notes that really aren't all that important or useful. In this mode, we'll write down everything, even things that we may already know!

So how do you take effective notes from your text books? Instead of highlighting or writing out your points while you're reading a section, first read the section (be it a heading, or a subheading), and once you've read the entire section, or paragraph, write out some notes on a separate sheet of paper. Think back to the recitation exercise that you've just completed, these can often become your condensed notes.

You want to minimize the amount of useless information in your notes, to save time when you are reviewing for exams and assignments. Try to pinpoint the central message of a paragraph—what is the author trying to tell you? Often, you will find this near the beginning of the paragraph, with the remaining material being a (sometimes lengthy) explanation of the authors perspective.

Also make note of a key example to help clarify your understanding of a concept. Do not, however, make notes on each and every example that is offered—there will usually be several.

When you come across a word that is unfamiliar to you, record it in a running glossary for that course.

If describing a relationship, for example, it may be useful to recreate a simple diagram or flowchart.

And finally, stay organized! Colour code your notes, give your notes titles that include the date, and the note page number (otherwise you will invariably lose them at some point), and make a note of the page within the text where you can find helpful information.

Keep these notes in a loose leaf binder, so that it is easy to include them with your lecture notes and handouts.

## PRACTISE

- ◉ Active reading is a challenging technique that takes some practise.
- ◉ In order to make the most of the information here, it is essential that you continually practise new skills
- ◉ Changing formed habits is not easy, so don't be discouraged if it seems challenging at first—don't give up!

It is not easy to simply start using new study strategies, and it takes time and practise to develop new habits. At first, new study techniques may seem tedious, and you may feel like the time you're spending that task could be put to better use. Rest assured that it takes time to develop all new habits, and after some time you'll find it becomes easier and less of a burden with each passing week.

Don't give up!

## STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

- ◉ For even more help with improving your time management skills, or for advice on other ways to improve your study habits, visit our website:

[www.wlu.ca/study](http://www.wlu.ca/study)

- ◉ Visit the Study Skills office: Room 117, Macdonald House Residence, first floor
- ◉ Call to book an appointment: 519.884.0710 ext. 2222

For more assistance, visit our website, stop by the Study Skills Office, or call to book an appointment—you'll be glad you did!