



SQ3R

Increasing Your Retention of Written Information

SQ3R is a useful technique for fully absorbing written information. It helps you to create a good mental framework of a subject, into which you can fit facts correctly. It helps you to set study goals. It also prompts you to use the review techniques that will help to fix information in your mind. By using SQ3R to actively read a document, you can get the maximum benefit from your reading time.

How to Use the Tool:

The acronym SQ3R stands for the five sequential techniques you should use to read a book:

- **Survey:** (2 minutes):
Scan the contents, introduction, chapter introductions and chapter summaries to pick up a shallow overview of the text. Form an opinion of whether it will be of any help. Before beginning reading look through the whole chapter. See what the headings are—the major ones and the subheadings, check for introductory and summary paragraphs, references, etc. Resist reading at this point, but see if you can identify 3 to 6 major ideas in the chapter.
- **Question:** (usually less than 30 seconds)
Make a note of any questions on the subject that come to mind, or particularly interest you following your survey. Perhaps scan the document again to see if any stand out. These questions can be considered almost as study goals - understanding the answers can help you to structure the information in your own mind. Ask yourself what this chapter is about: What is the question that this chapter is trying to answer? Or—along the curiosity lines—What question do I have that this chapter might help answer? Repeat this process with each subsection of the chapter, as well, turning each heading into a question.
- **Read:** (at your own pace)
Now read the document. Read through useful sections in detail, taking care to understand all the points that are relevant. In the case of some texts this reading may be very slow. This will particularly be the case if there is a lot of dense and complicated information. While you are reading, it can help to take notes. Read one section at a time looking for the answer to the question proposed by the heading. Find yourself a place and time where you can concentrate.
- **Recite:** (about a minute)
Once you have read appropriate sections of the document, say to yourself out loud or write down a key phrase that sums up the major point of the section and answers the question. It is important to use your own words, not just copy a phrase from the book. Research shows that we remember our own connections better than ones given to us.
- **Review:** (ongoing)
Once you have run through the exercise of recalling the information, you can move on to the stage of reviewing it. This review can be by rereading the document, by expanding your notes, or by discussing the material with colleagues. A particularly effective method of reviewing information is to have to teach it to someone else! Flash cards, notes or other material made during one of the above 5 steps, can be used to review for a few minutes every day for several days