

# HOW TO READ YOUR TEXTBOOK LIKE A (TEXT) BOOK!

A textbook is not a novel. Though you may have to read the whole thing, you can't just start on page one and read straight through to the end.

You read a text to acquire information, not just to follow a story, and there are specific techniques for reading a text. Good textbooks are designed with many study and reading aids. Examine your text for its structure, the information it contains, and how that information is presented.

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## EXAMINE THE TITLE PAGE

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- The title is the first clue to the book's focus and slant.
- Who wrote the book?
- What background and authority do they have? (Did your instructor write it?)

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## READ THE PREFACE AND INTRODUCTION

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- In the preface, the author(s) will explain new ideas or techniques.
- The introduction will explain the book's organization, its major emphases, and any special or updated features. It tells you what to expect and to look for.

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## READ THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Beware! There may be TWO, with two different patterns such as numerical and thematic, or brief and annotated.

- What are the book's major unit divisions?
- How are chapters organized, and what do they contain?
- Are there outlines, summaries, and introductions?
- Are there study or review questions, vocabulary lists?

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## CHECK THE "END MATTER"

*(all those pages at the back of the book such as an index, glossary, appendices, maps, charts, or tables)*

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- The index lists pages where specific topics are discussed; it's the best way to find material quickly for study or review. Know how to read the index and use subheadings and cross-references.
- Use the glossary to learn the meaning and pronunciation of the jargon of the subject. Vocabulary is a major element of a subject, especially when you are just beginning.
- Appendices contain information the author thinks is important but which doesn't fit neatly into the text. There might be copies of documents, lists of formulas, discussions of problems or background information.
- Materials such as chronologies, maps, conversion tables, and flow charts are valuable sources and study aids.

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## LOOK AT A SAMPLE CHAPTER

*Perhaps the first chapter or the first one you are assigned to read.*

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- Flip through and note features such as introductions, headings and subheadings, vocabulary in boldface or italics, charts and illustrations, "sidebar" items separate from the main text, summaries, study or review questions, and vocabulary lists.
- Read introductions and/or summaries **first**; they tell you what concepts and terms to look for in the main text.
- **NOW** read the main body of the chapter, alert to the ideas you saw in the introduction/summary. Look for lists, theories, definitions, explanations, and conflicts. Note references to illustrations and sidebars, but don't spend too much time on them unless you find them helpful.
- Don't expect to understand everything on the first reading. As you read, make notes in the text or on paper; ask questions, copy or highlight important vocabulary, names and dates, and major concepts.
- **Reread the chapter**, paying particular attention to information you didn't get the first time through. If some pieces are still puzzling, note them. See if the instructor explains them in class; if not, be sure to ask about them!
- Notice how reading a chapter like this builds in repetition from simple (outlines) to complex (the actual text) presentation of the ideas in it.

Reading a text can feel like a very choppy, stop-and-go process. Because you are reading to **acquire, comprehend, and retain** information, you have to be more analytic and systematic than when you read for entertainment.

Your reading speed may slow. You may need to alter your reading environment and have fewer distractions. You may have to read complex information several times to fully understand and remember it.

It's usually not vital to remember what was in Ann Landers' column last night, or the thriller you read last week. But you do need to remember and understand the material in a field of study!