

CHAPTER 4

Read with a Purpose

The higher your grade level in school, the more reading you're asked to do. By the time you reach college, reading will be a major part of your studies. You won't be going to school for the rest of your life, but you will be reading. Whether you use reading skills on the job, for learning how to repair the faucet, or just for fun, you'll need good reading skills.

Undoubtedly, there are some types of reading that you love to do—maybe novels, fan and fashion magazines, or comic books. Wouldn't it be great if you could devour all your school reading in the same way? If you set a purpose, preview your reading, read actively, and review faithfully, you'll be surprised how much more rewarding your school reading can be.

The tools in this chapter can help you read more effectively to improve your grades now. They'll also set you up to enjoy reading for the rest of your life.

Evaluate the Reason for Your Reading

Reading isn't just reading to take in words, sentences, and paragraphs. It's reading for a reason. The writer had a reason for writing the words, sentences, and paragraphs. You have a reason for reading them. Your reason has everything to do with how you should approach the reading task.

Here are examples of some different kinds of reading you probably do, with reasons you might have for doing each. Can you think of specific materials you have read that match each type of reading in the table?





Type of Reading	Purpose
Pleasure	To relax, to transport your mind to a fantasy world, to enjoy the stimulation of other people's ideas
Previewing	To prepare for a class, to decide whether a book contains the type of information you need for a research project
Skimming	To get the overall idea, to locate specific facts you are looking for
Careful reading	To remember the main ideas and related details, to figure out how you agree or disagree with the author
Intensive reading	To be able to re-create what you read, for example, to follow step-by-step instructions for hooking up a stereo system

Each type of reading demands a different approach. Each requires a different level of concentration. As you read about the techniques in this chapter, think about which ones you could apply to each type of reading you do.



What Do You Love to Read?

Maybe it's not your textbook, but a magazine, the latest book from your favorite novelist, letters from friends, "how to" books, and so on. Your leisure-time reading can tell you something about how you can read your textbook well. Think about how you feel when you read your favorite material. Why do you read it? What are you looking for? Do you remember what you read? What makes you remember it? Write the answers here in a short paragraph.



Enter Your Reading Zone

Some types of reading really put your brain to the test. So think about how you can work with your brain, not against it, when you do assigned reading. All the suggestions in chapter 2 for setting up a study zone apply to getting your mind ready to focus on reading, too. You need good light, a comfortable temperature, few distractions, and a place to sit up straight (not in bed!) and concentrate. To position the book for low glare and easy viewing, prop it up at a 45-degree angle.

Give yourself time to settle into a good concentration mode. Then take stretch breaks every 15 minutes and walk-around breaks at least every 50 minutes.

An ideal place to do reading assignments is the library. It's tidy, quiet, and well lighted, and has plenty of straight-backed chairs.



When you really need to read intensively, find a cubbyhole away from the main aisle. Train yourself not to look up every time someone walks by.

Preview the Text Before You Read It

Don't launch into reading until you know where you're going. Reading is much easier and faster if you first map out the territory. The way to do this is called *previewing*.

Begin each reading session with a preview of coming attractions. It's like stretching and warming up before heading to the starting line of a race. It gets your mind in gear, gives you a reason to read, and suggests the best approach to take.

Your preview may take 2 minutes or 15 minutes, depending on the type of reading you are doing. You might worry that previewing just slows you down. But give it a try. You'll find that this small time investment pays big dividends when you get down to the business of reading.



Here are three steps to effective previewing:

1. Establish the purpose of the reading.
2. Look for the structure.
3. Form questions about the material and guess the answers.

The following sections explore some of the details of these three steps.

Establish the Purpose of the Reading

Ask yourself why you are reading this material. Is it for fun, to see a different viewpoint, to stimulate your ideas, to fill a gap in your knowledge, or to decide whether it contains information for your research paper? Are you reading to memorize something in detail for a test, to get an overview of a subject, or to teach yourself step by step how to do something?

If you don't hold the answer yourself, look for clues from the teacher and the author. Consult your class notes to see whether the teacher mentioned why this reading was important and how it would apply to your class work. Read the preface to learn why the author wrote the book.

Whatever the purpose of the reading, match it up to your own personal reason: to get a better grade, to understand the world better, to have more interesting things to talk about with friends, or whatever.

Look for the Structure

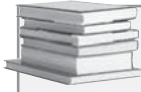
The person who wrote what you are reading took great pains to organize the subject matter in step-by-step fashion so that you could understand it. The writer probably formed a picture of you in his or her mind and asked: How can I convey what I know and love about this subject to my reader? How can I build up a mental picture in the reader's mind to help my reader learn and remember the material?

The writer divided up the topic into chapters, topics, subtopics, lists, and other logical chunks that you could understand. The main ideas and supporting details were then written within that logical structure.

The more you grasp the structure that the writer set up, the better mental map you will have for organizing your own recollection of what you read.



The overall structure makes the details make more sense, and you will remember them more easily.



A Structure-Identification Exercise

Most books have a lot of clues to help you recognize the structure and purpose of the material. Pick up any textbook and find each item in this list. Then pick up any library book and do the same. What kinds of information does each item give you about the subject matter?

Item	Textbook	Library Book
Front and back cover, dust jacket		
Table of contents		
Preface		
Introduction		
Index		
Chapter introductions		
Chapter learning objectives		
Topic headings (in larger, heavier type)		
Subtopic headings (smaller than topic headings)		
Topic sentence (usually the first or second) of each paragraph		
Words made to stand out by underlining, italics, or bold type		

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Item	Textbook	Library Book
Numbered and bulleted lists		
Tables, charts, diagrams		
Illustrations with explanations		
Special features (boxed or otherwise highlighted to stand out from the main text)		
Chapter summaries		
End-of-chapter questions, exercises		

Form Questions, Guess the Answers

As you scan the chapter titles, topic headings, and key words, turn each one into a question. This energizes your mind to lock onto specific issues and grasp any details that might answer the questions. Ask yourself *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*. Make the questions lively and interesting. Here are a couple of examples:

“What would I have done if I had been president then?”

“What’s it like to be a teenager in Zaire?”



Then guess what the answers might be. Draw upon what you already know about the subject. You’ll make important links to your storehouse of knowledge. You may find you already have a partial framework for learning the new material. Then the material won’t seem so unfamiliar.



Reading Time

Time yourself reading a textbook for four minutes. Then divide the number of pages that you read by 4. This is your average rate per page for that particular subject. Use this rate to plan how much time you need to complete your daily reading assignments in that class. On your weekly schedule (see chapter 1), allow ample blocks of time for these assignments. Include extra time before and after your reading blocks to preview and review the text.



Mini-Quiz

What are the three steps to effective previewing?

Read Actively

After you finish previewing the text, you're ready to read quickly through the material. Just engage your mind, and off you go.

If you're doing careful reading, as in studying a textbook chapter, read each paragraph quickly for the main idea. Then pick out one or two supporting details and any key terms.

If you own the book, highlight or underline the main ideas and details. But don't highlight everything in sight, or else you'll lose the power of this active reading technique. Highlight just the top 10 percent of the material. *Hint:* Don't highlight anything until you've read the entire paragraph. You can't be sure which is the main idea until you've followed the writer's complete thought. If you don't own the book, jot down in your notebook the key words and phrases as you would record a class lecture. Label them as notes from your reading.



Get more than just your eyes involved in reading. Involve your whole body, mind, and imagination. Draw a picture of what you're learning. If you're reading literature or a play, try to "hear" the voices of the characters. Read key passages out loud to hear what they sound like. "Feel" yourself into the picture.

If you're reading about the circulatory system, you can "be" an oxygen-hungry red blood cell, carried on a swift current through the bloodstream. Hear the loud *ka-thunk, ka-thunk* as you approach the heart. Feel yourself being swooshed through the heart and lungs and catapulted back out into the aorta. Sounds crazy, right? But surely you've seen *Inner Space* on TV or ridden *Body Wars* at Disney World? It's the same idea, and there's no better way to "get into" the topic you're reading about than to imagine yourself in the middle of it.

Feed your brain a rich diet of pictures, sound, and touch that packs all the ideas from your assigned reading neatly into your memory bank.

Every now and then, however, your mind is bound to wander. It's the same old problem of the mind moving faster than the eye and letting itself be open to any distraction. Just corral your mind gently back to the task at hand. Remind it how happy you'll be when your good reading habits net you a better grade.

Reading Mathematics Assignments

Reading mathematics is different from reading other subjects. For example, if you're working on a report for history or literature, you might be expected to read 40 pages in one evening. A reading assignment in mathematics, however, is typically only two or three pages per evening. Unfortunately, most students skip the reading and proceed directly to the homework problems. Most students then return to the reading assignment only to consult the examples and look for clues to help them complete their homework. The disadvantage of this approach is that when students encounter problems that differ from the examples, they are stuck. Rather, you should prepare for a reading assignment in math as you would any other reading assignment and add a few other helpful items as well.



Every time you sit down to read mathematics, have paper and a pencil handy. You'll need to write things down as you go along. You'll also need them to work through the examples step by step. Other items you might need include a calculator, a protractor, and graph paper. Chances are good that you'll need these items to look at some calculations, copy a diagram, or graph some equations.

One important thing to keep in mind: Don't rush! A good reader of mathematics may linger over the meaning of a couple of sentences for several minutes. This is your opportunity to think about concepts that might have been mentioned in class, but you were too busy copying down everything on the blackboard to absorb it all.

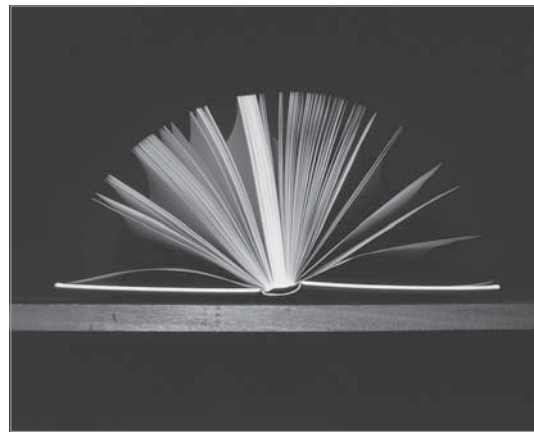
Finally, it's more than likely that there will be a few practice problems at the end of the reading. Don't skip these. Work through the practice problems and make sure you understand them before tackling your homework assignment.

Speed Reading: Is It for You?

There's a way to read much faster than you are used to. It's called *speed reading*. The idea is to train your eye to see line by line, not word by word. Line-by-line reading helps your reading rate catch up to your brain's fast pace. There's less time for your attention to wander, so you absorb more of the material.

When you read a line of text, your eye does not scan smoothly from one end of the line to the other. It jumps from point to point, focusing each time it lands.

When you first learned to read, your eye probably jumped from letter to letter until you sounded out a whole word. As your skill improved, your eye jumped from word to word. Chances are, your eye now jumps to four or five spots per line, taking in two or more words at each focal point.





All speed reading does is train you to take in larger groups of words at a single focus—maybe two to three jumps per line. If you get really good at it, you can take in a whole line of text at one focus. You might then run your finger right down the center of the page to pace your line-by-line reading.

To get a feel for speed reading, try reading the following words of storyteller Nathaniel Hawthorne. Do not read individual phrases word by word. Instead, follow the dots in a straight line from the top of the page to the bottom. Let your eye pause briefly at each dot. See whether you can take in the phrase below it at each pause.

•
The moonlight glistened
•
on their steely scales,
•
and on their golden wings,
•
which drooped idly over the sand.
•
Their brazen claws,
•
horrible to look at,
•
were thrust out, and clutched
•
the wave-beaten fragments of rock,
•
while the sleeping Gorgons dreamed
•
of tearing some poor
•
mortal all to pieces.
•
The snakes that served them
•



instead of hair seemed
•
likewise to be asleep;
•
although, now and then
•
one would writhe,
•
and lift its head, and thrust out
•
its forked tongue, emitting a drowsy hiss,
•
and then let itself subside
•
among its sister snakes.

Try this several times. How quickly can your eyes move from dot to dot? Do you still grasp the meaning?

Some people think speed reading makes you lose the meaning of the text. But research shows that speed readers actually understand better what they read, because their minds have less chance to wander. Speed reading works especially well if you combine it with the other techniques described in this chapter.

You can take classes or buy material that will help train you in speed reading. Ask your reading teacher for recommendations, or visit Web sites such as the following:

Speedread America	www.speedread.org
Speed Reading 4 Kids	www.speedreading4kids.com
RocketReader	www.speedreading.com



Mini-Quiz

How is reading math assignments different than reading English assignments?

What is the purpose of speed-reading?

Review for Recall

You've come to the end of the text. Now what? Put the book away and go have some fun? Not just yet. Invest just a few more minutes in refreshing the mental pathways to the new ideas you have just learned.

Ask yourself the questions you made up during your preview. Try answering them out loud, in complete sentences. Ask yourself how you could use this information in your daily life.

Look back over the highlights of the text you read. Get a feel for the order and structure of the subject matter. Write a summary in your notebook, using your own words. Make lists out of things that seem to go together.

Your review may reveal areas that you still don't understand. Mark each of these with a big question mark. Make a point of following up until you get them straight. Often a different viewpoint helps. Try reading about the same topic in a different textbook or on a Web site. The other author may do a better job of explaining the parts you didn't understand. Or, look it up in an encyclopedia, talk it out with a friend, or ask the teacher to go over it in class. Don't give up until you understand it.



Review time after reading is an important secret for improving your grades. Give yourself this short time to ponder the text before getting back to your daily routine. You'll thank yourself for this little gift when you discover how much easier it will be to study for the next test.



Mini-Quiz

What are some tips for reviewing what you've read?



Think About Improving Your Reading Skills

Think about the subject in which you have chosen to get a better grade. How important are good reading habits to your mastery of that subject? Explain.

This chapter suggested many ways to improve your reading habits. Write which suggestions you plan to use in your chosen class. Set a goal for how long you plan to try them out.



Greg

Reading was the last thing Greg ever had on his mind. He wanted to be doing, not sitting. He wanted to be with people, not cramped in a chair with his nose in a book. He wanted to make things happen, get people organized, accomplish things. How better to prepare himself to wheel and deal in the business world, a dream he had held ever since he earned his first five dollars mowing a lawn.

Now in his junior year, Greg was beginning to think seriously about colleges. He wanted to do everything right, so he sat down with his guidance counselor to make a plan. “You know, Greg,” said the counselor, “you could stand to pull up these grades in English and history. This is a critical year for establishing a good grade-point average.”

“It’s reading,” said Greg. “I get so bored with it, it takes me forever, and I just can’t sit still that long.” “But Greg,” said the counselor, “maybe you don’t realize how much reading you’ll have to do in your college courses. And someday when you’re a CEO, you’ll spend a great deal of time reading reports from the field. Maybe you need to work on your reading skills.”

Greg thought about this during the next few days. He really wanted to pursue his dream, but his dream was closely tied to reading, which he hated. He thought about the tradeoffs he would have to make—taking some time away from his leadership projects to work on reading skills now, earning better grades, and getting into a good college. Doing all these things would give him a chance to read effectively in college, earn better grades, and get into a better business school. It seemed like a good deal. “I’ll make it happen,” said Greg out loud.

From a book, Greg learned some tips for improving his reading skills. He set up a timetable to try out the techniques. As he worked “previewing” into his routine, it somehow felt familiar.

That Saturday, the cross-country team, of which he was captain, was running at a school across town. During the half-hour before the race, the coach jogged the team slowly along the cross-country course, over the hills and through the woods, past the shed, and around the football field. As they jogged, the coach pointed out course markers and terrain where they would have to run cautiously because of mud and tree roots. As the start of the race neared, the team warmed up by touching their toes and leaning into trees to stretch their calves and ankles. That’s when a light went on in Greg’s head.



“Hey, this warm-up is just like previewing when I read! I get a picture of where I’m going, and when I start reading, I’m ready to read without stumbling and hesitating. Good deal!”

At the starting gun, Greg leaped out ahead of the huge pack of runners, inspired by his recent insight. “Whoa, slow down; you gotta pace yourself,” he remembered. He did pace himself and finished with a personal best time.

As the months sped by, Greg practiced his new reading techniques with his textbooks and his English literature. He previewed, highlighted, took notes, wrote summaries, and took a few minutes after each session to think about how the reading might apply to his own life.

The nicest thing Greg discovered was that, when he read with a purpose, reading went much faster. He actually finished his assignments sooner than he used to. He liked this, because it gave him more time to be with friends and perfect those “people” skills that someday would help him run ahead of the pack in the business world.

Quiz

1. Describe five different purposes for reading. How would your course and speed differ with each type of reading? _____

2. How can you work with your brain, not against it, in doing your reading assignments? _____



The Secrets of Getting Better Grades _____

3. While previewing your reading, establish the _____, look for the _____, form _____, and guess the _____.
4. When your mind wanders during reading, what can you remind it of to keep it focused? _____

5. Every time you sit down to read mathematics, have _____ and _____ handy.
6. The principle behind “speed reading” is to read _____ by _____ instead of word by word.
7. If you do not understand the material in a reading assignment, what four sources can you look to for help? _____

True or False?

8. Previewing your reading saves time in the long run. T F
9. When you read your textbook, underline or highlight at least 50 percent of the material. T F