

Reading a Textbook: Beginning

Reading a textbook is unlike reading for pleasure or reading to get information that you want for yourself (like finding out who won last night's game). Textbooks are designed differently from novels and contain information that you need to use and remember. Fortunately, you can

Make a Textbook your Ally, not your Enemy!

I. Before you go to the first class:

Check out the book as a whole. How is it laid out? Does it have a table of contents? How much material does it cover? What's in the back?

- A *glossary* will give you definitions of important terms, so you don't need to keep trying to find them in the chapter.
- *Appendices* (singular: *appendix*) contain detailed technical information. A math book, for example, may have all the formulas together in an appendix; a physiology book may have diagrams of body systems, a political science textbook may have relevant documents, a history textbook may have time lines.
- An *index* lists subjects alphabetically. Sometimes books will have different indices (plural of index). Be sure to check, so you don't spend the semester looking up names in the subject index or vice versa.
- You may also find answers, suggestions for further reading, graphs or charts, formulae (mathematics or science textbooks).

Does the textbook come with on-line help, either through a DVD or a website?

Unhelpful material: A lot of textbooks today contain extraneous material with lovely pictures that is supposed to make you think the book is interesting and relevant. Even a hefty textbook looks less intimidating if you realize you don't need to read parts of it.

II. During the first week of class

Find out what your instructor expects you to get from the reading. Should you read every page carefully? What are you responsible for knowing from the reading?

Some instructors will give you this information. It's fine to ask the professor what types of information you should be getting from the reading.

- Fine to ask: “Could you tell us what you’d like us to get from the reading?”
“Is it important for us to memorize all the dates” (or formulas, or terms)
- Don’t ask: “Do we need to read all this?”

Check out your syllabus and see how it coordinates with the book. How much do you have to cover each night or each week?