

Tips for Successfully Absorbing Information from Textbooks

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Spending hours reading the textbook does not guarantee that you will *understand* and *absorb* the material, and despite a student's hard work, a course grade is generally determined by performance, not effort.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to start your reading early and follow these study suggestions, which is a compilation of advice from learning specialists, published research, professors, and your fellow students:

1. **Spread out your reading.** Look at how many pages of reading are assigned and break up the reading into manageable chunks, scheduling a specific time to read and take notes on each section. At the end of each subsection, review what you learned. Take short breaks if needed.



2. **Skim** through reading assignment BEFORE reading it closely. What are the subheadings/ subsections/new vocabulary? What appears to be the gist of the reading assignment?



3. **Turn headings into questions and then reflect on them.** [Ex. "Metacognition and Memory" → *What is the impact on (or the connection between) Metacognition and Memory?*] If you don't know, you're then looking for the answer, which increases your chances of engaging with and recalling what you read. If you think you know, then you're looking for confirmation.

4. Once you have completed the reading assignment, **go back and read it again, this time taking notes** as you read the materials. Yes, take notes – don't just underline/highlight the material. Write down the questions you would like to ask in class. I (*Prof. Ambwani*) will ask to see your textbook notes when you meet with me after exams.

5. **Stop and ask yourself, "what did I learn?"** Without looking at the book, try to recall the major points and key terms (if you cannot recall this information, you'll need to re-read the relevant subsections).



6. **Use retention strategies that work for you** – make outlines, draw pictures, create mnemonics (like "PEMDAS"), identify associates and personal examples, re-write text/lecture notes... Using strategies that help you organize the information will help you better encode it in your memory.

7. **Avoid distractions** while you study (avoid the TV, music with lyrics, and crowded places, and turn off your phone, messaging, email alerts, social media.) Set a timer and allow yourself periodic breaks as these will help you better concentrate.



8. **Learn the material as you go** – don't let assignments accumulate. Consider yourself an academic athlete – after all, you wouldn't prepare for a big tournament by sitting around for weeks and then pulling an all-nighter at the Kline Center. Similarly, you should not need to spend too many hours studying for the exam – by exam time, you should already know the material (so it will just be review)

9. **Study when you are alert** – yes, that 1-2 hour break between classes can be used productively to study. Falling asleep on your textbook at night does not count!



10. **Take responsibility** for your own performance. This is your education. [Professors] expect that you will spend at least 7-8 hours *every week* preparing for class (this does not count the time spent in class) – so use this time efficiently.

11. **Test yourself** to make sure you really know the material. Better yet, get together with a peer and test each other. The most useful means of preparing for an exam is to put away your notes and your textbook and force yourself to have to recall answers to questions that are likely to be on an exam.

