

Educating Your Textbook

An effective marking system

College professors carefully select college textbooks because they contain a wealth of relevant information, which is organized to facilitate student understanding. All of this relevant and organized information will be useless to you unless you read your texts. The following suggestions are offered to make you a more effective reader and a more successful student.

OBJECTIVES

1. To offer suggestions on how to preview your textbook and each chapter.
2. To identify the advantages of carefully marking your textbook.
3. To present an effective method of marking, or educating, your text.

I. SURVEYING YOUR TEXT AS A WHOLE

Before you read your text, you should survey it. Surveying your textbook is a bit like checking a road map before starting a trip on an unfamiliar highway. You survey a text to see what it is about and how it is organized. You should check the following:

1. Glance through the table of contents. Notice the major areas and topics to be covered, and how they are grouped together.
2. Check the course syllabus to determine which chapters will be covered and which will be omitted. Indicate this in the table of contents.
3. Determine what kind of learning aids are built into the text. See if it contains, for example, an index, a glossary, chapter summaries, answers to exercise sets, etc.
4. Establish a reading schedule for yourself by (i) calculating the number of pages you must read, and (ii) dividing this by the number of weeks in the semester. Write and complete the following statement at the top of the table of contents: "I must read -pages a week." Use stick figures, one for each week, to keep track of your reading schedule.

II. PREVIEWING A CHAPTER

You should actually "read" a chapter at least three times. The first reading is a mere preview. Previewing a chapter is a bit like checking a travel guide to discover points of interest to be visited during a trip. To preview a chapter you should:

1. Read the introductory section, or opening paragraphs, of the chapter to identify the major topic or main idea to be discussed in the chapter

2. Skim through the chapter noticing all the major headings and subheadings; glance at any charts, graphs, diagrams, drawings, etc.
3. Read the concluding section, or closing paragraphs of the chapter. This section often usually sums up or reviews the main points of the chapter in a few succinct statements.

The second reading of the chapter should be a quick read straight through the chapter. You just want to get a good initial understanding of the material.

III. MARKING YOUR TEXTBOOK

The third time you read a chapter you should read with a pen in hand. Read deliberately, marking your book. Marking your text should be a selective process. The purpose of a good marking system is to distinguish between various types of information and different levels of importance. Marking your textbook is sometimes referred to as the process of "educating your textbook" because this book becomes an even more valuable learning resource tool. Why should you make this third reading?

Advantages of marking your text

1. The first advantage of marking your text is that the marking process keeps you actively involved in the learning process. Because marking your text focuses your attention you are less apt to let your mind wander to other things while reading.
2. A second advantage is that the marking process leads to better understanding of the material. The marking process forces you to ask questions of the text in your mind (e.g., what is this piece of information, is it important, where does it fit? , etc.), and to hunt for the relationships among information provided in the text.
3. A third advantage of marking your text is that a carefully educated textbook aids in test preparation because you can easily identify and review the more important material in the text. And an educated book may prove valuable for years to come.

A set of marking symbols

- Draw a BOX around the central theme, major topic, main idea of the chapter.
- Draw a CIRCLE or OVAL around the main idea of each heading.
- Double underline = the main idea of each subheading.
- Underline each statement supporting any statement in a box or circle, or a statement which is double underlined.

- Place BRACKETS[] around any key term which is being defined, and underline the actual definition. You might also write Def in the margin.
- Place PARENTHESES () around the individual items in a list, e.g., causes or reasons for, consequences of, personalities involved, etc. And you might also write superscript numbers by each opening parenthesis or write 1, 2, 3, n, in the margin.
- Use marginal notes. Develop your own. Some suggestions include:
 - * or a star = an important idea, thesis: a possible essay question.
 - Ex or e.g. = examples
 - ? = Something you don't understand; an unclear or confusing statement.

Using such a set of marking symbols may seem a little clumsy and time consuming at first, but as you gain experience you will hardly notice yourself doing it. If you so desire, you can practice this marking system on one of your textbooks and ask a SLAC tutor to review it. They can offer advice and additional suggestions for marking your textbooks.