

Reading for Understanding: The SQW3R Method

Reading is one of the core activities of study. You need to be able to understand what you read and to be able to recall the main ideas when you need them. You can use the SQW3R method to improve your comprehension, to remember a reading for tutorials, seminars or to review for exams.

S = Survey

Before you start to read, survey the material to gain an overview of the contents.

Look through the whole reading/ chapter to preview it. Approach it by scanning:

- title(s) and subheadings
- summaries or abstracts
- the introduction and conclusion
- visual materials (pictures, charts, graphs or tables) and their captions
- the first and last sentences in paragraphs
- the conclusion
- any focus questions

Note how the reading has been structured and look for the author's plan. This will give you an idea of the main thesis.

Q = Question

Your reading will be more memorable if you question the material.

As you are surveying, note down your questions. Writing down questions keeps you alert and focused on your work.

1. Ask yourself:

- What is this chapter/ article about?
- What did my lecturer/ tutor say about this chapter or subject?
- What do I already know about this subject?
- How does this reading relate to what I already know/ have read?

2. Devise questions that will guide your reading:

- Think about specific questions for which you need to, or would like to, find answers.
- Read any focus questions at the end of the reading.
- Turn the title, headings and subheadings into questions. For example, if the heading is Qualitative and Quantitative Research, your question might be: 'What is the difference between these two types of research?'

3. Make a list of your questions for consideration. You will use them during review to help you remember what you have read.

R1 = Read

Be prepared to READ material twice.

First, read without making notes:

1. Decrease your pace and read actively. Active reading requires concentration, so take your time and find a quiet place where you can read and focus.
2. As you read, look for answers to the questions you noted down earlier.
3. Question the author's reasoning. Is each point justified? Is there enough evidence? What is the evidence?
4. Compare diagrams and illustrations with the written text. Often you will understand more from them.
5. Make sure you understand what you are reading. Reduce your reading speed for difficult passages. Stop and reread parts which are not clear.
6. If you have difficulty understanding a text, look up difficult words in the dictionary or glossary of terms and reread. If the meaning of a word or passage still evades you, leave it and read on. Perhaps after more reading you will find it more accessible and the meaning will become clear. Speak to your tutor if your difficulty continues.
7. Use reflection to increase your understanding of what you read. When the author makes a claim, reflect on your prior knowledge to support or disprove it. If this raises more questions, note them down. This will help you remember and understand. But keep in mind that you are using personal reflection only as a learning tool—it is not sufficient to prove or refute a research finding.

W • (Read) + Write

On your second reading, begin to take notes:

1. Take notes from the text, but write information in your own words.
2. Read one section at a time (a section might be divided up by headings or subheadings).
3. After you read a section, try to sum up the main point in one sentence.
4. Note down the main idea(s) of each paragraph in a section. They are often found in the first or last sentence.
5. Examples and illustrations can further your understanding and be good cues for memory. Look for important details (supporting evidence, written illustrations of points, provisions or alternatives).
6. In your notes, underline or highlight the important points. This will be useful for later review.
7. Refer to the list of questions you made earlier and try to answer them.

R2 = Recall

RECALL straight after you finish taking notes.

You should have an outline of the reading in note form. You should now try to recall and write your thinking about what you have read.

1. Close the book and cover your notes.
2. Make notes of what you remember about the main thesis and points of the reading.
3. Check their accuracy against the notes you made during your reading.
4. Return to the reading. Read one section at a time and try to recall what you have read. If you were unable to recall one of the major points, then reread that section of the reading to clarify it further.
5. It can also be helpful to RECITE ideas aloud to help you remember. Sum up the main points verbally—reciting can help you put ideas into your own words.

R3 = Review

Now REVIEW what you have read.

At the end of your study period:

Check the accuracy of your notes against the original material (if you have underlined the main points, this should be simple). This is an important part of the process because it can really help you clarify and remember what you have read.

The next day:

1. Read through your notes to reacquaint yourself with the main thesis and key points.
2. Now read through the questions you noted down and try to answer them from memory.
3. Try doing the same thing after a few days.

If you are reading for a course, periodically reviewing notes will help you at exam time. The more you review throughout semester, the less you will need to cram during exam study periods.