SQ3R STRATEGY

SQ3R stands for survey, question, read, recite, and review (REFERENCE). The strategy is an independent study method that aids in student understanding of the organization and meaning of written texts. It is a five-step procedure for making reading more active and improving student understanding of reading assignments. By providing structure and a concrete plan of action, SQ3R empowers students and provides a sense of control over reading tasks. And by requiring that students look at the reading several times and process the information in several ways, SQ3R enhances the registration and recalling of new information in/from memory.

One advantage of SQ3R is it may be used for reading assignments in most academic disciplines, including social sciences, physical sciences, and arts and humanities. The method, however, does not lend itself to numerically-oriented subjects like math and statistics. Additionally, SQ3R can be used for reading a variety of reading materials, including textbooks and journal articles, as long as the structure or organization of the material is not too complex. SQ3R has proven to be an effective strategy for most college-level reading tasks. Another advantage is that SQ3R is relatively simple and straightforward. As such, modeling and feedback by a facilitator usually is not necessary. SQ3R makes reading a more active process, helping to maintain attention and improve remembering.

Recently, limitations of the SQ3R strategy have been examined. According to Neal and Langer (1992), SQ3R is not as broad in scope as some other reading comprehension strategies, like their [mediated instruction of text](http://www.muskingum.edu/~cal/database/general/reading.html#Mediated#Mediated) (MIT) strategy. SQ3R represents only one strategy while MIT is a suite of strategies that may be applied in various combinations for an effective approach to reading comprehension. McCormick and Cooper (1991) report that several studies of high school students indicate SQ3R, which was designed for average students, is not an effective strategy for improving literal comprehension by learning disabled students. They also note that LD students understood and remembered more information when reading shorter (e.g. 300 words) passages. So for learning disabled students, interspersing short passages with review questions is more effective than putting questions at the end of the reading.

Despite these alleged limitations, SQ3R offers an efficient approach to reading for most students. Of course, individual results in reading comprehension with SQ3R will vary. But all students should be exposed to the strategy, and it should become part of their "strategies arsenal" for use in appropriate situations.

Other reading comprehension strategies (PQ4R, RAP, SNIPS, PARTS, etc.) are very similar to SQ3R. They are described elsewhere in this page; refer to the [reading strategies](http://www.muskingum.edu/~cal/database/general/reading.html#Strategies#Strategies) menu for a complete list.

*Survey*

The first step of the SQ3R strategy is to survey the reading assignment. Surveying involves creating a mental map of the text and selective reading.

To begin surveying, look quickly over the material for textual markers or clues about the [manner of organization](http://www.muskingum.edu/~cal/database/general/reading.html#TextBookOrg#TextBookOrg) of the text. These include table of contents, chapter titles, headings and subheadings, and numbering systems. The organizational clues are used to create a "mental map" to help the student move through the material.

The mental map encompasses the general structure of the reading and is used to guide the student as he/she reads. By mentally linking the textual clues, the student is better able to follow the flow of ideas in the reading and to detect the relationships among pieces of information.

If the text lacks headings and other textual markers, the student should pay attention to paragraph breaks and clue phrases like "most important" and "in summary." Use that information to identify the author's main ideas and to create one's own headings in the margin. In fact, accurate mental maps made by the student can be more effective than those based on the author's headings.

Some students chose to record the organizational map on paper rather than to commit it to memory. There are a variety of recording methods; see the [Organization](http://www.muskingum.edu/~cal/database/general/organization.html#InfoOrg) page for ideas.

Developing a mental map is important because "detailed information can be remembered only if it is learned in relation to more important ideas" (Bragstad and Stumpf, 1987, p. 251). The map may also be used later when reviewing the text.

The second aspect of surveying is selective reading of portions of text (Bragstad and Stumpf, 1987). First, reread the title and think about it. What previous knowledge do you have about the topic? Can you recall any past experiences with the subject? What do you anticipate learning based on the title? Then read the first paragraph of the chapter or the abstract of the article. They should describe the main topics to be covered in the chapter or paper as well as the author's purposes or goals. Sometimes the results or conclusions will be given in the abstract. Reread the headings to refresh one's memory of the main topics of the text and to check the mental map for accuracy. Read the first sentence of each paragraph, and then read the last paragraph or the summary to get a review of the main concepts or conclusions. Quickly scan the visual aids like figures, photos, and tables.

*Question*

The second step of SQ3R involves predicting questions that may be answered by the material. The questions are elaborations of the mental map developed in the survey phase, and they serve as an individualized knowledge framework or template to which details may be added later.

By actively engaging one's attention and curiosity, questioning provides the reader with a purpose and makes important ideas more obvious. The student creates meaning for him/ herself. Comprehension is aided by finding the answers to predicted questions when reading as well as by locating important information not covered by the questions. Predicted questions may be used later to study for quizzes and exams.

To develop questions, turn major headings and subheadings into questions. Draw upon previous knowledge and experiences to develop questions that may be answered while reading. Questions that arise while surveying the assignment should be recorded as well. The predicted questions can be compared to those at the end of the chapter. Numbering questions makes it easy to organize the answers later while reading.

With the mental map and predicted questions, one has prepared his/her own knowledge framework to guide reading of the assignment.

*Read*

With the knowledge structure in mind, read the assignment one section at a time for content. Instead of focusing on isolated details, search for relationships among the main ideas and their supporting details. Look for information that answers the predicted questions, and take note of unexpected ideas.

The reader is advised to refrain from highlighting the text while reading because it may distract him/ her from the content of the text. A better approach is to jot down brief notes in the margins or to indicate the question numbers next to the portions of text that provide the answers.

*Recite*

After reading each section of text, take a few minutes to recall the important points. In order to actively make mental connections among main ideas and details, recite them aloud or write them down. Go over the answers to the predicted questions and/or summarize the section. Recitations should be done without consulting the book unless necessary. Paraphrasing aids in understanding. Immediate recall is essential for registering the information in long-term memory. Without recitation, almost half of what one reads is lost from memory after only one day!

*Review*

After reading and reciting the text section by section, review the entire chapter or article to see how the information fits together. This total review allows the reader to evaluate his/her understanding of the text, to organize all of the main ideas and supporting details, and to reinforce them in memory.

When reviewing, refer back to the headings and subheadings as well as the predicted questions and answers. Look at notes written in the margins while reading. Information that was underlined or highlighted may also be reviewed. Flowcharts, outlines, and other visual aids may be used to organize the important information, and they provide study aids for future exam preparation. In a few sentences, summarize the purpose and main ideas of the reading; write the summary down or say it aloud. Or, the information generated during the review may be recorded on audio tape for future referral.

Repeating the review process every week greatly improves one's ability to remember the information. And, it cuts down on preparation time for exams later.