

Text 1b

The SQ3R reading and study system

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The SQ3R system was developed in the 1940s and has been used successfully since then. Introduced by Robinson (1946), it is especially useful for reading academic texts, because it helps the reader to understand and to remember the information in them.

The term 'SQ3R' stands for **S**urvey, **Q**uestion, **R**ead, **R**ecall and **R**eview. These are the five steps you need to take when reading an academic text purposefully, particularly if you want to understand a text fully in order to achieve a goal such as completing a writing task or preparing for a tutorial.

The first step, to **survey** the text, means that you should look at the title, section headings, images and graphs and other figures in the book or article. It is also important to think about what the written style can tell you about the type of text it is (e.g., is it an academic text? Is it an introductory textbook or a peer-reviewed research article?) and briefly check any references in order to get some idea of the source(s) of the material.

After surveying the text, you should begin to **question**. The first questions should relate to the overall topic. Ask yourself: 'What do I already know about this?' 'What more do I need to know?' A longer text may be divided into sections, each one with a heading, and you can ask similar questions of each section. You could turn each heading into a question and think about what information might be given. For example, an article about 'contemporary culture' might have a section headed 'The role of museums'. This could easily be turned into questions, e.g., 'What is the role of museums in contemporary culture?'

The first of the three Rs is **read**. At this point you are likely to use several different reading strategies. The first step is to skim the article for a general idea about the text – reading for the 'gist'. This will help you become more familiar with the content – giving you a global view and enabling you to see more clearly how the text is organized. Next you need to scan the text and see if any of your questions are answered. Finally, read intensively the parts of the text that you have already decided are likely to be most relevant, and identify the main ideas and any other useful information (including, where relevant, the sources of information, as indicated by the references). A good way to find useful information again – for example, to use in an assignment or in examination revision – is to mark the information using underlining or a highlighter pen and/or to write notes in the margin.

The second R is **recall**. To *recall* means to 'remember'. Recalling is an essential aspect of the reading process. It can be done at various stages in reading a text – for example, in the case of longer texts, after reading paragraphs and/or sections. You should cover up the text you have read and try to remember the main points. Have your questions been answered? What information was given in each paragraph or section? Recalling this information will tell you how much you have actually understood. If you cannot remember a point, look at the text again, check your understanding of what you have read and repeat the point to yourself. This process also helps you focus on the essentials of the text and express these in your own words. At this point you could write down everything you remember in note form – possibly set out as a mind map.

The final R is **review**. At this stage you should check the text again to make sure your notes are accurate and you have written down everything you need from the text.

Reference

Robinson, F. P. (1946). *Effective study*. New York/London: Harper & Brothers.

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