

Introduction

The Psychology of Studying Psychology

How to Communicate with Your Textbook

In the chapters that follow, you will learn about personality, emotion, creativity, abnormal behavior, and a host of other interesting and useful topics. Since this book is your link to this information, a few words follow about how to make best use of it.

SQ3R The chapters of this text are designed to help you use the *SQ3R* method—a valuable *study-reading* technique introduced over 40 years ago by Dr. Francis P. Robinson. The *SQ3R* approach is designed to help you (1) select what is important, (2) understand these ideas quickly, (3) remember what you have read, and (4) review effectively for tests (Robinson, 1941). The symbols *SQ3R* stand for important steps in effective study reading:

Step One: Survey Look over the title and main headings in each chapter before reading in detail. Read captions under any pictures or illustrations. Read any summary statement or review if the chapter has one. This step should be a quick survey, taking no more than two minutes. It gives you an overall picture of what is in the chapter.

Step Two: Question In order to concentrate on the content of a chapter, turn each topic heading into one or more questions. This will increase your interest in what you read, and it forces you to concentrate on ideas and information. The result is an increase in your comprehension.

Step Three: Read The first R in *SQ3R* refers to *read*. As you read, try to answer the questions you asked. Read only from one topic heading to the next, then stop. Don't go on to another heading.

Step Four: Recite The second R stands for *recite*. After you have turned a heading into questions and read only to the next heading, you should stop and recite; that is, try to answer your questions and summarize what you've read in your own words. If you can't answer your questions or summarize main ideas, scan back over the section until you can. It can be helpful at this point to jot down important terms and ideas in a brief set of notes that includes the questions you asked. After you have completed one section in this way, turn the next topic heading into a question and then read to the following heading. Again, you should look for answers as you read, and you should recite before moving on. Repeat this process until the entire chapter is read.

Step Five: Review When the chapter has been read completely, look over your notes and check your memory by reading the answers to questions again. Or better yet, get someone to ask you questions about each topic to see if you can answer in your own words.

Question: Does this method really work?

Experiments show that using the *SQ3R* method improves reading comprehension and efficiency (Boker, 1974). Students who haven't learned a reading strategy tend to read straight through an entire chapter and try to remember everything. This approach is only slightly better than not reading at all! It is not wise to read a textbook as you would a novel. You must actively "dig out" information and give yourself a chance to pause and digest what you are learning. A survey prepares you to read effectively by giving you an overview. Questioning maintains your concentration on the subject, and it allows you to read in short "bites." Recitation of what you've read allows you to actively participate in and check up on your learning. Finally, review of the entire chapter ties together what you have learned and Effective note-taking requires active listening.

Active us

SQ3R method helps avoid this. That's why it's important that you *not* keep reading an assignment, but that you stop periodically, recite by taking brief notes in your own words, and review immediately after the entire chapter has been read.

Question: You said earlier that the chapters of this book are set up according to the SQ3R study formula. Can you explain that?

The SQ3R method can be used with any text. However, if you glance through this text you will see that it is designed to help you use it. Look also at the end of this introduction, where you will find a sample chapter. Notice how the steps of the SQ3R method are a part of the format. The opening of each chapter is a preview, followed by survey questions for the chapter. Chapters are further broken up by questions which are answered in the material that follows. Recent research shows that this arrangement leads to improved learning and memory (Boker, 1974; Melton, 1978).

Periodically, there are "Learning Checks" so you can make certain that you understand the most important points. Toward the end of each chapter there is a short review, followed by two sections (called "Applications" and "Explorations") to extend your understanding. After the last chapter in the book, you will find a **glossary**, or "mini-dictionary" of psychological terms. However, to aid your studying, new terms are defined whenever they first appear in the text. As you read, notice also that key terms are printed in boldface type. *Italic type* is used to highlight additional ideas of importance, and to provide special emphasis. Pronunciations for unusual or unfamiliar terms are provided along with the term itself. For example, the word *somesthetic* (SOH-mes-THET-ik) is pronounced like the phonetic spelling in parentheses-capital letters indicate accented syllables. Together these features are designed to make learning psychology enjoyable and effective, but there are still some things you must do on your own.

Effective Note-taking

Question: The SQ3R may be good for study-reading, but what about taking notes in class when it's difficult to know what's important?

in the word **LIB~AN**, pronounced LISTEN (Carman and Adams, 1972).

L *Lead. Don't follow.* Try to anticipate what the instructor may be going to say. As in SQ3R, try to set up questions as guides. Questions can come from the instructor's study guides or the reading assignments. **I** = *Ideas*. Every lecture will be based around a core of important ideas. Usually an idea is introduced and examples or explanations are given. Ask questions such as:

What is the main idea of this lecture? What important ideas will help support this?

S *Signal words.* Listen for words that tell you the direction the instructor is taking. For instance, here are some groups of signal words:

There are three reasons why

Most important is -On the contrary

As an example

Here come ideas

Main ideas Opposite

idea

Support for main idea

Conclusion

Therefore .

A *Actively listen.* Sit where you can hear and where you can be seen if you need to ask a question. Be on time. Look at the instructor while he or she talks. Bring questions from the last lecture or from your reading you want answered. Raise your hand at the beginning of class or approach your instructor before the lecture begins. Do anything that helps you to be active.

N = *Note-taking.* As you listen, write down only key points. Listen to everything, but be selective and don't try to write everything down. If you're too busy writing, you may miss important parts of the lecture.

There is something more you should know about note-taking: In a recent study, psychologists Robin Palkovitz and Richard Lore (1980) found that most students take reasonably good notes-and then fail to use them! Palkovitz and Lore discovered that students who missed questions on tests could later find the answers in their own notes. Apparently, most students waited until just before an exam to look at their notes. By then the notes were so old they had lost much of their meaning. If you don't want your notes to seem like hieroglyphics, it pays to review them on a *regular basis*. And remember, whenever it is important to listen effectively, the letters LISAN are a guide to better comprehension.

Taking Tests

Question: If I have read effectively and listened effectively in lecture, is there anything else I can do to improve my study

skills?

One area that often gives students difficulty is test-taking. Learning the material in a course is only a first step. You must then be able to show what you have learned on a test. Here are some guidelines for test-taking you might consider.

Objective Tests Objective tests (multiple-choice and true-false items) are often reading tests. They check on your ability to recognize a correct statement among wrong answers or a correct statement against a false one. If you are taking an objective test, try this:

1. Read the directions carefully. Don't assume that because the question has a T or F to circle, or four or five items to select from, that you know what to do. The directions may give you good advice or clues for the test. If the directions are not clear, ask the instructor to clarify them.
2. Read each statement or question carefully. If you have several choices for each item, read them *all* before deciding the correct answer. You may mark one you think is correct only to find the last choice says "both a and d," yet you only marked "a" as the answer.

3 Skip items you are not certain about. Go through the test answering the ones you do know. If there is time left, go back to the ones you skipped.

4. Eliminate certain alternatives. With a four choice per item multiple-choice test, the odds are one in four that you could guess right. If you can eliminate one of the alternatives, your odds are one in three. If you can eliminate two alternatives your guessing odds are one in two, or 50-50. Those are better odds than pure guessing.

5. There is a bit of folk wisdom that says, "Don't change your answers on a multiple-choice test. Your first choice is usually right." Careful study of this idea has shown it to be *false*. Students who switch answers are more likely to change from wrong to right than the reverse (Davis, 1975;

Edwards and Marshall, 1977). This is especially true if you feel *very* uncertain of your first answer. When you have strong doubts, your second answer is more likely to be correct (Johnson, 1975).

Essay Tests Essay questions are often a student's weak spot simply because of poor organization, poor or no support of main ideas, or not writing directly to the question. When you take essay exams try the following:

1. Read the question carefully. Make sure that you note key words, such as *compare*, *contrast*, *discuss*, *evaluate*, *analyze*, or *describe*. These words all demand a certain emphasis in your answer.
2. Think about your answer before putting words on paper. It's a good idea to make a brief list of the points you want to make in your answer. Just list them as they pop into your head. Then rearrange your points so that you have them organized in the order you want to write them.
3. Don't beat around the bush or pad your answer. Be direct. Make a point and support it. Get your list of ideas into words.
4. Look over your essay for spelling errors, sentence errors, and grammatical errors. Save this for last. Your ideas are more important than misspelled words or poor sentence structure. You can work on such problems separately if they affect your grades.

Self-Testing and Overlearning Many students overlook one of the most direct approaches for improving test scores: When studying, you can arrange to take several "practice tests" before a real one is given in class. In other words, studying should include **self-testing** by use of flash-cards, "learning checks," a study guide, or questions you have written for yourself. When you study you should say to yourself, "What could I be asked about this?" Ask as many questions as you can and be sure you can answer them. Studying without testing yourself is like practicing for a basketball game without shooting any baskets

When you prepare for exams, there is something else to keep in mind: Many students *underprepare* for exams, and most *overestimate* how well they will do on exams before taking them (Murray, 1980). A solution to both problems is **overlearning**. In overlearning, study or practice continues beyond "bare mastery" of a topic. This means that you should give yourself enough time for added study and review *after* you think you are prepared for an exam.

The tips on learning skills given here are just to get you off to a good start. Additional help is available in the books listed at the end of this section. You may also want to look ahead to the discussion on improving memory at the end of Chapter 10.

Procrastination

Whether you're on probation or on the dean's list, a tendency to procrastinate is almost universal among college students. Even when procrastination doesn't lead to failure or lowered grades, it can cause much suffering. Procrastinators put off work until the last possible moment, work only when under pressure, stay away from classes and avoid professors, fabricate reasons for late work, and feel ashamed of the last-minute work they do (Burka and Yuen, 1981).

Question: Why do so many students procrastinate?

College work revolves around deadlines and long-range assignments. A tendency to put off work under these circumstances is fairly natural and not limited to school. However, there are some special reasons for student procrastination. Psychologists Jane Burka and Lenora Yuen, who have worked with procrastinators, observe that many students seem to believe the following equation: *self-worth*

- *ability* \times *performance*. That is, students often equate performance in school with their personal worth. By procrastinating, students can blame poor work on their late start, rather than a lack of ability-after all, it wasn't their best effort, was it?

Perfectionism is a related problem. Students who have very high standards or expectations for themselves may find it hard to start an assignment. Such students seem to expect the impossible from themselves and end up with all-or-nothing work habits (Burka and Yuen, 1981). If you tend to procrastinate, you might find it interesting to list the excuses you've used to avoid studying, and then examine what the excuses tell about your attitudes toward schoolwork

Time Management Burka and Yuen supervise an eight-week program for procrastinators at the University of California, Berkeley. Eventually, they say, most procrastinators must face the self-worth conflict; but useful progress can be made by learning better study skills and effective time management. Since we have already discussed study skills, let's consider time management.

A **formal time schedule** can do much to prevent procrastination and maintain motivation in school. To prepare your schedule, make a chart showing all of the hours in each day of the week. Then fill in times that are already committed: sleep, meals, classes, work, team practices, lessons, appointments, and so forth. Next, fill in times when you will study for various classes, and label them. Finally, label the remaining hours as "open" or "free" times. The beauty of keeping such a schedule is that you *know* you are making an honest effort to do well in your classes. Not only will you get more done, you will also avoid the trap of thinking about playing when you are trying to work, and worrying about working while you are trying to play. The key to time management is to treat your study times as serious commitments, like class meetings or a job, and to respect your free times as well. By doing so, you will avoid the feeling that you are working all the time, when in reality you are worrying all the time, but accomplishing little.

Motivation

Question: All these study techniques are fine, but what if I'm just not interested in some of the courses I have to take?

It is important to realize that virtually every topic is interesting to someone, somewhere. Although I may not be interested in the sex life of the South American tree frog, a biologist might be fascinated. If you wait for your teachers to "make" their courses interesting, you are missing the point. Interest is a matter of *your attitude*. No teacher can "make" a course interesting without your help. In fact, many students find that their interest in a subject develops only after they have made an effort to master basic ideas. If you bring an inquiring mind and a positive attitude to your studies, you will find learning exciting, challenging, and interesting. If you wait passively to be entertained, you will find learning a chore. Students and teachers *together* make a class interesting.

A Final Word There is a distinction made in Zen between "live words" and "dead words." Live words come from personal experience; dead words are "about" a subject. This book can only be a collection of dead words without your personal involvement. It is designed to help you learn psychology, but it cannot do it for you. You will find many helpful, useful, and exciting ideas in the pages that follow. To make them yours, you must set out to learn *actively* as much as you can. We think it will be worth the effort. Good luck!