

## **Efficient Study Reading**

### *Relating the Parts to the Whole and the Whole to the Self*

**Some of the points below may be new to you. See how many describe your habits, and see how many you would like to explore further. There will be a discussion of each point below the list.**

1. I set specific goals before I start a reading assignment.
2. I survey the main headings, subheadings, and illustrations before reading a textbook chapter or any other reading assignment.
3. I can recognize main ideas as I am reading.
4. I vary my reading speed, depending on my purpose for reading.
5. If I don't understand something that I am reading, I stop briefly to analyze why.
6. I read for understanding as well as for information.
7. I sit up while reading.
8. I read in a place that is evenly lit.
9. After completing a reading assignment, I test myself on the material.
10. When I am using a reference book, I read the editor's advice on how to use the book.
11. I read with an open mind.

### **Discussion**

All of the points above relate to setting up conditions for efficient, focused study reading. There will be a basic consistency in the related advice below: setting up the right initial conditions, having clear purposes for reading, keeping an open mind as we read, being flexible with our reading rate, being able to test ourselves at the end.

#### **What are the Initial Conditions, and How Do We Maintain Momentum?**

We want to avoid distractions, so we read in a quiet place where we will not be interrupted. It is better to sit upright in a comfortable chair than to lie down when we read. This keeps us more alert. The area where we are sitting should be well lit, so there is no eyestrain.

If we are studying for an hour or more, it is good to take a short break about every half-hour. Taking a short walk or just looking out the window for a while is a good way

to rest the mind and the eyes. In this case we are not being distracted; we are just revitalizing the mind, so it stays fresh and alert.

### **Why is Having Specific Purposes for Reading Important?**

Reading assignments usually fit into one of the following categories:

- ❖ Gaining an overview of material to be presented in a lecture
- ❖ Supplementing material presented in a lecture we have already heard
- ❖ Generating ideas for a paper or project
- ❖ Researching a topic for a paper or project

Being clear on our purpose will help us determine how thoroughly we need to read the assigned material.

If we are using a reference book, we check to see if the author gives advice on how to use the book most efficiently. This usually appears in the front of the book. If there is no section on advice, we quickly look through the book to see how it is organized and set a simple plan for using it efficiently. The table of contents and the index to the book can help us find what we need to accomplish our purpose for using the book.

A basic technique for setting purposes for other types of reading and organizing ourselves in light of these purposes is described below.

### ***The SORT Technique for Efficient Study Reading***

The acronym stands for **S**urvey, **O**rganize, **R**eview, and **T**est. Linda Egenes, M.A., a former Maharishi University of Management faculty member, designed this system. The steps are as follows:

#### **• Survey**

In this first step we decide on our basic purpose(s) for reading. Then we quickly look through the book to gain an overview of the material. We look through the pages to see what the material is about. It works well for textbooks and articles because they almost always have headings and subheadings. For material that does not have many or any headings, we can scan the paragraphs quickly for the topic sentences.

#### **• Organize**

We determine which parts of the reading provide information that will serve our particular purpose(s). Then we focus on just these parts. We look for main ideas and supporting details that serve the purpose of our reading.

• **Review**

This step helps us determine if we have found all the material we need to serve our purpose and that we understand what we have read. If we own the book, we underline main points and make notes in the margin alongside these points. If we are not able to write in the book, then we take notes in the same format outlined in the SORT Technique for Active Listening and Note Taking. Also we write out any questions we might have or any points we do not understand. If using material from the Internet, it is best to print out the pages so we can underline important points and make notes in the margin.

• **Test**

We test ourselves in different ways, depending on our purpose for reading.

- ❖ For research reading it is important to make sure we understand what we have read so we will be able to express it clearly when it is time to write. We compare our notes to what we have read to make sure they are accurate. If we come to any parts that we don't understand, we write out why we do not understand the point. Making it clear to ourselves why we do not understand helps us to see what gaps need to be filled for complete comprehension. Making a list of sources that might help us understand any unclear points is also very useful. (For example if we see a new word in a research text that is not clearly defined, we can look up the term in the dictionary or on the Internet.)
- ❖ For other reading assignments, we find time to test ourselves on the material. The same day is good if we have time. If we can write in the book, we write key words in the margin that will trigger a question. If we can't write in the book, then we can write the key words on a post it note and put it near the related text. Then we ask ourselves questions and answer them out loud or in writing.

Important note: If it is time to stop in the evening, and we have not completed the "Test" step, we do not stay up late to complete it. We find time the next day to do so. Avoiding strain is very important for efficient study reading. Otherwise we'll forget most of what we think we have gained.

### **A Flexible Reading Rate: Why is this Important?**

Skimming and scanning can help organize the material we are reading. They are two very useful techniques for increasing efficiency as we read.

It is not always necessary to read every word. If our purpose is to find useful information, then we can scan a page (looking for key terms that indicate useful information). If our purpose is to find main ideas, then skimming (reading quickly to get a basic idea of what a selection is about) saves time and allows us to pinpoint main ideas. If our purpose is to understand supporting details, then we should read the appropriate sections more thoroughly.

### **Comparing Reading to Listening**

Both reading and listening can be treated as the process of learning from a teacher. Both are ways of being instructed, and require skills in the art of learning. Listening to a lecture is in many respects like reading a book.

The difference is that listening involves learning from a teacher who is present, while reading involves learning from someone who is not in the room.

If we ask a teacher a question, he or she will answer. If we do not understand the answer, we can ask for clarification. If, however, we “ask a book a question,” we must research the answer ourselves. And we need to keep on it until we are satisfied with the answer. That is what keeps the process active, and that is what helps us understand and remember the important points.

### **Try This**

Print out this handout so that you can read through it again and set your purpose for reading as wanting to be able to teach someone else how to read efficiently.

Using the *SORT Method for Efficient Study Reading* read through this handout and then outline a brief plan for your next reading assignment.

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We'd love to hear from you. Let us know about your experiences using the advice in this section.

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