

Read for Success!

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All Write!

It's getting harder to get things read these days, isn't it? The amount of reading matter available has mushroomed, and the portion of that mountain firmly pressed into our own hands and mailboxes continues to grow. The pace of everyday life shows no sign of slowing, while the need to become informed and stay informed only grows more urgent.

No matter what level each of us occupies on the corporate ladder, reading is requisite to good job performance. Then, after the eye-strain and brain-drain at work, we go home to the flyers, brochures, magazines and newspapers deposited daily at our homes. Some of it is important material, too. Spare time finds us at the computer, searching, reading and blogging. At bedtime, many of us finally find the chance to pick up that great novel borrowed from the library – until the zzzz's take over.

No, there is no doubt we're reading more every decade and, although much of the reading matter swirling around our busy lives is either of no concern to us or of little real value to *anyone*, the material that *does* matter cries for our attention. There's no getting around it – we all want and need to read effectively. Our goal is to read an article, book or report one time and walk away from those pages with everything we need to know. How does one do that? Is there a proven technique for effective reading, one that an individual can learn and apply without attending an expensive seminar? Absolutely!

The best technique I know for making the most of reading time, wringing the greatest understanding from a page, is nothing new at all. I didn't make it up. It's not based on modern technology or recent research. It's the way I was taught to read effectively in elementary school! You might have learned it too; this might be merely a review for you. If it's an approach you've never learned before, you can have confidence in the method, knowing it really was supported by research and has stood the test of time.

Can you remember the last time you read something, only to put it down and say to yourself, "I have no idea what I just read"? Have you found yourself rereading the same page two or three times because the page has failed to register in your consciousness? You see, in almost every case, the reason we fail to read effectively is that we fail to **engage** with the material. Our minds do not interpret or comprehend what our eyes are seeing. We have two hands holding the document and two eyes scanning the page, but higher headquarters is out to lunch.

Failure to engage mentally with your reading material does not mean you have attention deficit disorder or another serious problem. Oh, you are temporarily experiencing an attention deficit – no doubt about that. But, for two reasons, you can feel confident that it's not a disorder: (1) It

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happens only when you *read*, and not even in *all* reading sessions; (2) You can train yourself to overcome the problem simply by adopting different reading behaviors. This inefficient reading syndrome plagues nearly all of us to varying degrees from time to time. The inattentiveness is related to *reading* specifically. And there is a solution that you can learn in the next few pages. So try to pay attention, huh? (just kidding).

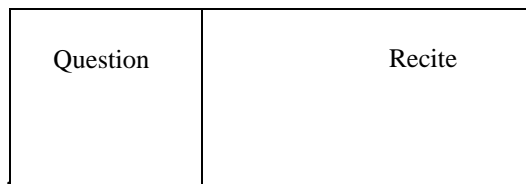
You'll recall that I said I learned this method in elementary school. If you are of my generation, perhaps you learned it too. Did you ever use the SRA Reading Lab? This was way back, before the electronically individualized learning made possible by computers. The Lab was simply a card file of short reading lessons, but we were taught to approach them in a special way: **SQ3R**. Do you recall ever learning that method? It originated in a 1946 book called *Effective Study* by F. P. (Francis Pleasant) Robinson (New York: Harper and Brother). Robinson, born in 1906, wrote several books about reading and studying in addition to the one that gave us SQ3R.

Robinson's SQ3R method of reading really caught on and is still in use today. Several web sites provide a brief overview of the method. Virginia Tech offers an online workshop (free) devoted specifically to using SQ3R for reading textbooks. You can find it at www.ucc.vt.edu/lynch/TextbookReading. The very same workshop appears verbatim on a British site related to humanities and social sciences; it is maintained by a Karen Stevenson. Illinois State University and Emory College both provide overviews of SQ3R on their web sites. So, you see, as old as Mr. Robinson's method is, many of us who learned it at a young age valued it enough to preserve it and recommend it to succeeding generations. Now I offer it to you.

SQ3R: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review

Robinson's technique is all about mental engagement with the reading material. Now, you probably wouldn't use this technique to read a novel for pleasure, but, I promise you, it will work for just about anything else. My recommendation is that you apply SQ3R whenever you are faced with reading matter of importance, especially if you have any doubt about your ability to read it, comprehend it and retain it after one go-round -- for example, a dry report you must read for work or an article in a trade magazine you need to summarize -- the kind of reading that you turn to, not for pleasure, but for a good reason nonetheless. So let's learn how to do this.

You'll need a piece of scrap paper -- perhaps several, depending on the volume of reading you're undertaking. I'm going to give you a visual of the ideal way (theoretically) to arrange your paper, but, with practice, you will adapt it to your own needs and do things in your own way. To get started, though, why not try this: Take an 8.5X11-inch sheet of paper and turn it horizontally, in "landscape" view. Either draw a line or make a fold so your paper is divided into two unequal sections as in the illustration below.



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Remember the goal: Mental engagement.

SURVEY: Don't jump right into the first sentence and read the first paragraph, moving steadily forward as you would for a mystery thriller. Instead, make a mystery thriller out of the report or article you're facing. By surveying first, before reading, you create for yourself a series of hooks. You are looking for items of interest, points to pique your curiosity so that you will be mentally engaged before you even begin. Go about it like this:

- Read the title
- Glance quickly through the introduction
- Read over all the bold subheadings
- Glance at the visuals: charts, illustrations, cartoons, etc.
- Scan sidebars and pull-quotes if there are any
- Definitely read through any questions posed, either at the beginning or end of the section

In giving your attention to these items, you are stirring mental curiosity. How is it subdivided? Why do they have a picture of that, for heaven's sake? What seem to be the big issues here? Before you ever begin to read, you want your antennae out, your nerve endings attuned, and your mind hungry for more. So always begin by surveying the entire section. (You decide how to break it into sections on the basis of its overall length and format.)

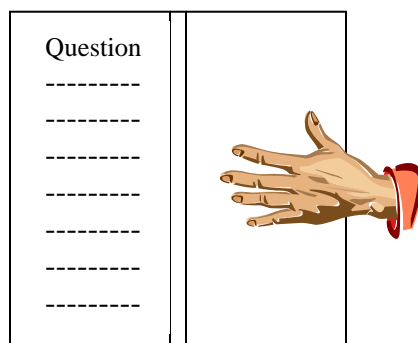
QUESTION: You're going to buck me on this one, but you'll be glad you did it when you get to the last paragraph. Remember, your goal is to read so effectively that you can walk away informed, inspired – and finished with the reading task. As you conduct your survey, actually write down the questions that come to mind. Sure! It's just like "taking notes," except that this note taking is seasoned by sincere curiosity. You're not attempting to outline a chapter or summarize a report. You're generating questions of sincere interest to you, and then writing them down to create a measure of accountability. List your questions down the left side of that piece of scrap paper. Skip a few lines between questions. Don't bother with neatness – just survey and question at a healthy pace.

Question	

READ: Decide exactly how much you're going to read in the first round, but make sure it is no more than you have surveyed and questioned. Now read, looking hungrily for the answers to your questions. As you find them, jot them down very quickly and concisely. Your goal is not to rewrite the report in your own words, but to use the writing process only as a trigger to keep you mentally active. If you find an answer to a question you didn't think of, jot down the answer; don't worry about the question. Ideally, you are jotting the answers in the wide right column. Now your paper looks like this:

Question	Recite
-----	Answer-----
-----	Answer -----
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RECITE: Now stop! That's really important. If you want to walk away from this 18-page report on why ants don't fly, you can't read it all at once. That's why, after you surveyed the entire section that you planned to read in this sitting (which, for an 18-page report, is probably the whole thing), you broke it into sections. After you read the first section, answering those questions as you go, stop and recite before you move on. Simply fold your paper over to cover the answers, look at the questions for section one, and see whether you can answer them. If you feel confident, you're ready for the next section. If not, you already know where your learning gap is and you can go back and remediate. Reread what you need to reread to get it all clear and firm in your mind.



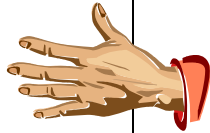
READ and RECITE as many times as you need to in order to finish the selection.

Question	Recite
-----	Answer-----
-----	Answer-----
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REVIEW: This is the final step and the one you'll be tempted to skip. If you really want to read effectively, though, don't skip the review. At this point you have read the entire report (or whatever you have decided to read during this sitting). Now you will fix the information in your mind so that you never, ever again have to read about why ants don't fly, yet you'll have prepared yourself to enjoy all these benefits:

- Look smart and well informed at tomorrow's staff meeting.
- Write a response to the report: a summary, rebuttal, or whatever has been assigned you.
- Quickly design a speech or presentation on the subject.
- Use this information in the long-term future because it is now stored in your memory bank in logical, meaningful format.
- Walk away from this reading material and not have to deal with it again. One task accomplished!

To realize those benefits, take time now to review the entire piece. Simply fold that paper over again and answer *all* the questions you have listed on the left. Identify gaps in your comprehension or recall and go back immediately to fill them in.

Question	
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And there you are! A method devised in 1946, taught to school children for a few decades, and remembered by scholars and professors who want their students to read effectively! And now it's yours to use as often as you see fit. Think of Francis Pleasant Robinson when you do.

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