PQRST: A Textbook Reading Strategy

**Step 1: Preview** (5-10 minutes)
Before reading a chapter, you should **preview** it. When previewing, you want to *get a sense of where you are going with your reading.* It is like planning for a trip to an unfamiliar destination – you most likely won’t get in your car and drive! Before leaving, you most likely make a plan; you look at a map, determine your destination, and figure out what you’re going to see along the way. Previewing a textbook is a similar process: you want to get a sense of what you will be learning about in the chapter before you start to read.

1. Read the title and the chapter objective. Ask yourself a few questions, such as
   - What do I already know about this topic?
   - What key concepts is the chapter going to discuss?
   - What has the instructor said about these concepts?
2. Skim the introduction, looking for hints about key concepts.
3. Read and think about the headings and subheadings. They outline the major topics and subtopics within the chapter. Consider making a chapter map.
4. Notice pictures and diagrams, charts, bolded or italicized words and marginal notes.
5. Read the summary, noting which points have received emphasis.
6. Scan the review questions.

**Step 2: Question** (1-2 minutes per heading)
After getting an overview of the chapter through previewing, it is time to start asking **questions.** In this step of the process, you generate questions to help focus your reading and find the key points in each section. Follow these steps:

1. Read the heading.
2. Predict questions based on that heading. Include questions based on who; what; when; where; why; and how. For tips on generating good questions, check out the Critical Thinking and Questioning section.
3. Jot your questions down in the margin of your text for easy reference.

**Step 3: Read**
After generating a few questions, you finally get to **read** - but you’re not going to read the whole chapter at once! At this stage, only read the section of text that applies to the heading with which you are working. As a general rule, usually one key idea is introduced in each paragraph. In fact, about half the time the key idea is found in the first sentence of textbook paragraphs. (Hint: About half the time it is found in the first sentence.) While you are reading the section, do the following:

1. Look for the answers to your questions.
2. Notice the bolded and underlined words or phrases.
3. Reread sections that are difficult. If necessary, break larger sections down into smaller sections or even paragraphs.
Step 4: Summarize

After you finish reading a section of text, **summarize** your learning by recalling the important ideas from the section you just read and recording them in your notes.

When summarizing, you might do the following:

- Locate and underline the key ideas. These ideas should answer many of the questions you generated.
- Summarize and record important concepts in the margins of your text.
- Take notes on paper or on your computer. Write the key ideas in point form and in your own words, so you understand the information better. The Cornell note taking strategy works well here because you can include the questions you have generated alongside your notes.
- Draw diagrams, if appropriate.
- Relate the new information you have learned to something you already know, and consider recording any helpful ideas in your notes. Ask yourself:
  - What does it remind me of?
  - Can I think of a real world example?
  - Can I connect it to something in my own experience?

**Next step:** Now go back and repeat the **Question-Read-Summarize** process (Steps 2-4) for the next section of the textbook. Repeat this process until you reach the end of the section or chapter you are reading. Then, review the chapter summary to ensure that you have captured all the key ideas.

Step 5: Test

Now that you have finished Steps 2 through 4 for the entire chapter, you can move on to the test, or review, stage. Keep the following strategies in mind:

- Read the questions you wrote and try to answer them aloud or in writing.
- Create a mind map of different concepts from the chapter.
- Make mnemonic devices to help you memorize facts.
- Create charts to summarize large chunks of information.

Textbook reading can be challenging and, sometimes, tiresome. With practice, the PQRST reading strategy can help you remain active and alert, so you can make the most of your study time.