Learning Module: The 3R System of Reading

This module provides you with a simple straightforward method of mastering conceptual and factual information from your textbooks.

The procedure is called the 3R System of Reading—Read, Record, and Recite (Pauk, 1989). It is similar to Cornell Notemaking (described in Learning Module: Notemaking & Recall Review): both are active approaches to learning that involve identifying key information, formulating questions, answering those questions, and then comparing answers to the text.

TASK 1 (using 3R with a chapter to be learned)

1. After Surveying the chapter (see Learning Module: Survey Reading) start at the beginning and read a paragraph or two. Then go back and ask yourself, "What do I need to know in this passage?" Read and reread until you find out. (Note: This is easier said than done, especially if your main goal is to get to the end of the chapter quickly. However, if you want to improve what you remember from your reading, then you may have to sacrifice speed until you get faster at this process.)

2. Once you have identified what you need to know (if anything), mark key words, phrases, and sentences that contain this information. Mark features such as main points, supporting points, key words, lists, definitions, unclear information, and so on. This module contains an example of one such system of marking, which you may use as a model (see Figure 1, Suggestions for Marking Textbooks). Take a minute and skim over that sheet.

By marking your textbook in that way, you make subtle distinctions among the above features that you would not if instead you simply highlighted seemingly important text with a yellow marker. With uncontrolled highlighting, often times it's all important! If you mark carefully, then when you review, the important features are readily apparent. Use a pencil when you mark the textbook because upon rereading certain passages you may decide that your initial thoughts were incorrect and require alteration.

3. Jot in the book's margin an ever-so-brief question that asks for the information underlined (see Figure 2, Sample 3R System of Reading). This serves the same purpose as the left column with Cornell Notes (see Learning Module: Notemaking & Recall Review).

4. Go through the entire assigned section paragraph by paragraph using Steps 1-3. (Some paragraphs may be redundant or unimportant and could be skipped, but be careful.) Also be sure that you are really picking out the core concepts, principles and facts and not falling into the trap of calling every little tidbit important. For instance, since examples are often easier to understand than the principle they illustrate, learners often focus on the examples instead of the principle. Of course, it's the principle that is most important. If you see an example, ask yourself what the principle is. Be discriminating!

5. It's time to study. All that you need is now contained in the textbook (the exception being those questions in the margin that require you to reproduce a diagram, or derive a particular formula, etc.—in those cases you will need extra blank paper and pencil).

- Start at the beginning and cover up the printed page with a blank sheet of paper, leaving the questions in the margin exposed.
- Then, in your own words, recite the answers to each question aloud. The goal is not to memorize the exact information, but to construct an accurate and complete paraphrase. If you need to peek, then realize that you don't yet know it.
- After reciting an answer, uncover the printed page and check for accuracy. Directly under the question in the margin, use check marks and X's to record if your answer was correct or incorrect. If you don't know the answer, give yourself an "X" then uncover the printed page and briefly glance at it, focusing on the highlighted parts. Can
you provide a correct answer now? If not, you should reread that passage. The goal, of course, is to fade out your reliance on the textbook and to recite correct paraphrased answers from memory. If you don’t know the answer now, you won’t know it tomorrow in class or be able to write it on the exam. So, while you have the chance, keep trying until you get the answer right.

**TASK 2 (practice makes perfect)**

Practice reciting the paraphrased answers regularly. *This is the key to this system.* Distributed practice over several days is superior to massed practice or cramming. Suppose you have 10 minutes before your next class. With your textbook organized in this way, you can accomplish a lot in a short period by simply opening your textbook and reciting answers to your margin questions. After you are doing well, try skipping around in the chapter to make sure that you still know the information when out of the normal sequence. When you can recite answers to your satisfaction, you have mastered the material!

Try reciting your answers using the following schedule for review:

- Immediately after reading and making the margin notes.
- Later that same day.
- The next day.
- After three days.

This sort of lengthening review schedule is a good pattern for remembering. Each time you practice remembering the information it will be a bit stronger and more durable. Before long you will be able to answer all of the questions. *You will know the material and you will know that you know it.*

This may seem like a great deal of work. The fact is that if you want to really know the material, and be able to recall it later when it is needed, then you need to practice until you have mastered it. Many students skip this important component of studying and pay the consequences with mediocre marks on exams and when required to use the information. And the fact is that these recall-review sessions are short in duration. As you master the content, it gets faster and faster. Furthermore, the time you spend reviewing and reciting is probably less than what it would take to reread the chapter later.

Our experience with this method shows that it works well *if and only if* students take the time to do periodic review. So, don’t skimp on this part! If you find that your memory for the information is very good each time you review, you can try to be more efficient by lengthening the time between review sessions. Stretch it out! But if you find that your recall is not good, then that is prima facia evidence that you waited too long. Let your performance be your guide!

**Weekly Review Schedule**

For each of your courses, in which reading and remembering is important, pick one day for a weekly review. Set aside an hour to do nothing but to review the past week’s readings and notes. For example, review your Biology on Mondays, Psychology on Tuesdays, etc. Remember, “review” means going over the questions and remembering the content of the chapter without peeking – not just looking at your questions and notes.

**TASK SUMMARY**

1. Choose a chapter that is required reading in one of your courses. Survey the chapter prior to reading it (see *Learning Module: Survey Reading*).

2. As you read that chapter, employ the 3R System of Reading. Practice answering your questions in the margin at least three times. Record whether each answer is correct. Bring your textbook to class or lab and share your use of the 3R method.

**REFERENCE**


**This Module Includes:**

1) Module: The 3R System of Reading (3R Reading Module.doc)
2) Suggestions for Marking Textbooks
3) Sample 3R System of Reading