

## Survey Q3R

### How to Study So You Won't Forget It Tomorrow

Over the years, scientists have carried out many experiments that tell us how to comprehend more effectively, and how to remember what we've comprehended. Francis Robinson has put together a method, Survey Q3R, that incorporates many of their discoveries. SQ3R is for the reader who has to read a chapter of a text or study it for a test.

► **Survey.** With practice, this process should take about a minute, says Robinson. The student:

- looks at the chapter title and all the headings in the chapter
- reads the chapter's first and last paragraphs, which usually introduce and summarize what has been said.

The object is to see what major topic the chapter discusses, and to learn what areas that topic is divided into. There are usually about three to five such areas.

► **Question.** Each of these areas usually has a heading. Take the first heading, and turn it into a question. For example, if the heading is "The Causes of the Civil War," your question becomes "What were the causes of the Civil War?"

This must be a broad question, instead of the short-answer type, because the information needed to answer it is spread over several pages in the chapter. It brings to mind what the reader already knows about it. More important, it gives the reader a purpose for the next step.

► **Read.** Now read this section. The express purpose is to gather the information needed to answer the question. As you read, write a few brief, headline-like phrases that list only the main ideas and the most important details presented. Outline form clearly shows the relative importance of each.

► **Recite.** When you have finished reading the section, presumably you can answer the question you asked yourself. Close the book and see if you can answer from memory. If you can't do it, or aren't sure, look at your notes or the book to check.

When you are satisfied that you know the material, make up a question for each of the remaining sections of the chapter in turn, and then read and recite to see if you can answer it.

► **Review.** When all the sections of the chapter have been covered, look over your notes to reinforce your knowledge of them. Further, this enables you to see again how all the parts of the chapter are related to each other. Robinson suggests that students should review by covering their notes to see if they can recite the most important headings. Then each of these headings should be uncovered, while the

student tries to remember the less important points under each one. However it is done, this review is extremely important in fixing the material in the student's mind, as we shall see.

Actually each of the steps in Survey Q3R is the result of investigations into how people learn and retain and what they read.

- **Why survey the material?** Experiments show that a survey is quite helpful. In one instance, students who were taught to preview read the material in 24 percent less time than nonpreviewers, with no loss in understanding. Obviously, the minute or two spent in surveying saves time, even though it appears otherwise.
- **Why ask a question before reading a section?** Clearly, a good question gives the reader a purpose and tells what to look for. This helps a reader to differentiate between more and less important information.

A question based on a section title also makes students conscious of this area as part of the author's line of reasoning or presentation. In reading to answer the question, a student looks for the **most relevant information** and integrates it into the author's thought pattern.

Without such a question, students often do no more than read "to find out what it says," in some vague way. It's comparable to the difference between looking through a book of craft projects with no purpose in mind and looking through it because we want to make a stool, and then finding exactly the information we wanted. We are **more involved** and take more away from the book in the latter instance.

Further, experiments show that students who are given questions before they read have **better comprehension** of the material (and remember it longer) than students who read it without questions.

- **As for the brief notes (in outline form)** that the student writes to answer the question, again experiments confirm that even students who have had less than two months practice in making these notes comprehend far more of the material than similar groups that do not take such notes.

In the third step, **review**, the student closes the book and tries to answer aloud the question created to guide the reading of the section. How well does the answer correspond to the notes made in step two? The recitation gives **practice in presenting** the material to others. And repeating the material shortly after it is learned helps the student to remember it.

A large-scale study showed that high school students tested immediately after reading something remembered an average of 53 percent of it. After two weeks, they recalled an average of less than 11 percent of it.

A group who reviewed the material one day after reading it remembered **46 percent** two weeks later. A group who reviewed the material right after reading it recalled **83 percent** of it one week later. Unfortunately, this latter group was not tested two weeks later. However, it is clear that reviewing the material shortly after it is learned is the most efficient way to decrease the forgetting that takes place.

Experiments also show that students who write things down with the awareness that they will have to repeat them, **remember them far better** than those students who write them without such awareness and, obviously, better than students who don't write them at all. Further, experiments also tell us that students who review the material in a **series of short periods of time** remember it better than students who spend the same amount of time reviewing it in one long period.

**SQ3R is a powerful tool**, because it incorporates much of what we know scientifically about how people learn and remember. As is the case with most worthwhile things a person does, it isn't done as effectively or quickly the first few times the student tries it as it will be after some practice.

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*Adapted for the Accreditation preparation course by Ferne G. Bonomi from Helping Your Teen-Age Student, Marvin Cohn, Ph.D., published by E. P. Dutton, 2 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016 1979. The original text was modified only to diminish the author's unvarying use of the male pronoun in referring to students.*