

Textbook Guidelines

This is just a suggested way to read the textbook. I realize that some of the things that I will suggest will seem to be impossible or repetitious, but each of the following steps will help you to read and understand the text. You should modify the suggestions to meet your needs or style of learning. After you have tried this and you feel that you are still having problems, talk to me. Together we should be able to figure something out. Don't wait until the last minute or until your grade is an F-! Talk to me when you see the beginnings of a problem.

History books tend to be written in outline form: thesis, main heading, sub-headings, topic sentences, and main points. By using this information, you can quickly look at what the chapter has to offer before you read, giving you a better chance of remembering some of the important ideas. What you want to do is keep the information fresh. You can do this by referring to the text over a period of days. Don't try to consume a whole chapter the night before! The times are just suggested. You need to create your own plan.

1. Browsing

Look through the chapter. Read the headings of the chapter, sections, and sub-sections. Read and look at all of the maps, drawings, paintings, graphs, and charts. Just "look around" at what you will be reading. You may absorb some things, but again, all you really want is a quick glance. Do not read the chapter at this point, just look. (15-20 minutes)

2. Skim-and-Scan

Read the opening remarks of the chapter. Read the first paragraphs of each section and sub-section. Find the thesis for the chapter and section. Read the first sentence of every other paragraph. Read the captions to the maps, graphs, etc. That's all. (30-45 minutes)

3. Careful Reading

Now read the chapter from start to finish. Carefully read every sentence and word. Re-read all captions. Be sure to spend time reading the whole chapter. I suggest you do this in one, but not more than two, settings. (1-3 hours)

4. Skim-and-Scan with Note-taking

With pen in hand, skim-and-scan again. Take outline notes with headings matching those in the chapter. Don't rewrite the book. Take quick notes of things you will need to remember. Jot down page numbers of important paragraphs. You may also wish to do flashcards. (1 hour)

5. Reminding

This is a skim-and-scan technique that uses both the text and your notes. Let the notes remind you what is in the text, referring to the text only when you need to. This is a final check before you study for the exam. (30-45 minutes)

I would suggest that you use the day before the exam as a rest and a final checkup. Don't spend a lot of time studying the text, but use your time wisely checking your notes. Reread the introduction and conclusion to each chapter. These are good reviews. Train yourself, though, to rely on good notes that reflect the important parts of the text.

After you have received the test back, go over the questions and answers. Check your notes. Why did you miss this question? What should you do to change your reading or notes to better prepare for the test? What part of the reading schedule was best for you? worst? How can you change to meet the needs that you have found? Do this evaluation after every test. By concentrating on your test-taking habits early on you will be prepared for the time when you will be tested over a greater amount of material.

Don't forget: don't ever give up! Always search for ways to better yourself and your techniques!