Reading Comprehension Strategy: SQ3R

What is it?

SQ3R is a simple five-step system developed in the 1940's by Professor Francis P. Robinson at Ohio State University. Because it has proven to be effective and efficient, it has continued to be taught and used at colleges all over the country for the past fifty years. This strategy is used by students when:

- The text is fairly structured and has some basic textbook aids for the reading (boldface headings, italics, study questions, etc.)
- A detailed understanding of the information is required.
- The amount of reading is extensive.
- The information must be retained over long periods of time.

How is it done?

Step 1: “S” is for SURVEY

1. Examine the title of the chapter you are to read. This is a good clue as to the general content of the chapter.
2. Read the introduction or introductory paragraphs. This is where the author presents the topic, the major problems to be discussed, and sometimes the way(s) these questions will be answered.
3. Skim through the chapter looking for pictures, charts, graphs, and topic headings. As you do this, you should become aware of a general outline the author used in writing the chapter. This skimming also provides you with an idea of how long the material is and approximately how much time you will need to read it.
4. Read the summary or concluding paragraphs. Here the author presents the major conclusions of the chapter.

Step 2: “Q” is for QUESTION

1. Questions should have the effect of reducing a reading to smaller, more meaningful ideas. Ask yourself what you already know about this topic. What can you expect to learn from this chapter? Did the instructor say anything in class or on a handout about this chapter?
2. If the author is trying to present a particular point of view, ask yourself if the justifies the position. Are there alternative explanations or points of view?
3. Convert topic headings into questions or create questions of your own.
4. Try to answer the questions printed at the beginning or end of the chapter if any are provided.

5. Formulate “in-depth” questions as well as obvious ones.

Step 3: **“R” is for READ**

1. Go in with questions and search for answers. Reading means more than just saying the words. Reading is a thinking process. Comprehension is vital.

2. Slow down for “dense” passages. A passage with a great many ideas cannot be read rapidly. If you have read a passage several times and it still doesn’t make sense, try reading it aloud.

3. Read one section at a time alternating the reading step with the reciting step, which follows. Make sure you understand each section before proceeding.

4. If comprehension of the material is difficult, try reading paragraph by paragraph or even sentence by sentence until comprehension is achieved.

Step 4: **“R” is for RECITE**

1. Stop periodically in your reading and ask yourself, “What did I just read?” Try putting the main points and supporting details into your own words. If you can’t do that, then go back and reread the appropriate parts until you can.

2. Some students find it helpful to write summaries of what they have read. This is an excellent way to review and prepare for an exam.

3. Verbalize your thinking. Prove to yourself that you really do know the material.

4. Two successful methods of recitation are underlining and note-taking:

   **Underlining**
   Underlining or highlighting should be done only after you complete the reading selection and only when you understand exactly what the author means. Be selective; mark only key words and phrases!

   **Note-taking**
   The same procedures are used for note-taking as underlining. It is crucial to discriminate between essential and non-essential information. The unsure student often takes too many notes.

Step 5: **“R” is for REVIEW**

1. If you have done all of the above, you will probably find that reviews are easily and quickly accomplished.

2. Skim over chapter headings, trying to summarize as you go.
3. If you have created written summaries, review them and try to expand on the information they contain.

4. Space review periods over several days or weeks. Your first review should be within 24 hours of your first reading. The next could be a week later. Keep reviewing on a weekly basis until the exam.

5. Reviewing includes two different and separate activities, both very important.
   - The first kind of review is pulling together the separate facts and ideas into a unified whole.
   - The second kind of review is the traditional one of restudying the material after a passage of time.

6. Review should also include reflecting on what is learned – making connection with previously learned information.

**Does this method really work?**

Many experiments have shown that using the SQ3R method improves reading comprehension and efficiency. Students who have not learned a reading strategy tend to read straight through an entire chapter and try to remember everything! *This approach is only slightly better than not reading at all.* It is not wise to read a textbook as you would a novel. You must actively “dig out” information and give yourself a chance to pause and digest the information you are learning. A **survey** prepares you to read effectively. **Questioning** maintains your concentration on the subject, and allows you to **read** in short “bites”. **Recitation** of what you have read allows you to actively participate in and check up on your learning. Finally, **review** of the whole chapter ties together what you have learned and increases your understanding.

One of the most distressing experiences students have when they read is to discover after a while that they have passed their eyes over several pages but don't really remember anything they read. More than anything else the SQ3R method helps avoid this. That is why it is important that you not keep reading an assignment, but that you stop periodically, recite by taking brief notes in your own words, and review immediately after the entire chapter has been read.