



## SQ3R

### Studying More Effectively

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Nowadays, it's easy to access new reading material. You can read on a smartphone, tablet, or e-book reader, and you can order traditional media such as books and magazines for next-day (or same-day) delivery.

However, it's not so easy to remember everything that you've read.

SQ3R helps you do this. It helps you think about what you want to get from a document, study it in an appropriate level of detail, and remember information well.

As such, it makes your reading both more efficient and more effective.

In this article, we'll look at how to use SQ3R, and we'll see how you can make it a routine part of the way you learn.

### Overview

Francis Pleasant Robinson developed SQ3R, and published it in his 1946 book, "**Effective Study**." He created the technique for college students, but, even now, it's suitable for learning in almost every situation, including at work.

SQ3R is an acronym that stands for five steps that you should use when reading something that you want to remember. These five steps are:

1. Survey.
2. Question.
3. Read.
4. Recall.
5. Review.

By following these steps, you ensure that you spend your time reading the most appropriate document, you study the right parts of that document in the right level of detail, you integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge, and you fix information in your mind, so that you can remember it in the long term.

### Applying the Tool

To use SQ3R, follow the five steps below.

#### Step 1: Survey

Start by skimming through the material you've identified, to decide if it will be useful and to get an overview of the topic.

For example, if you've selected a book, scan the contents, introduction, chapter introductions, and chapter summaries to pick up an overview of the text.

For a website, look at the "breadcrumbs," which indicate the relative location of pages within the site. (If breadcrumbs are used, they're usually at the top of the page.) Also use the menus or the site map to see where the article sits within the overall structure of the site.

Then, look at typographical elements of the text, such as italics, bold words, subheadings, and boxed text. These often point to words or ideas that are important.

Last, explore any images, maps, charts, or diagrams that are embedded in the text.

Use these clues to decide whether this text will give you the information you're looking for. If it doesn't meet your needs, look for a different information source.

## Step 2: Question

Now note down any questions that you may have about the subject. These could be the questions that led you to read it in the first place, or ones that you thought of during your survey.

Also, think about what else you want to achieve from this reading. What do you need to find out from this material? What are you most interested in learning? And how will this information help you?

When you question the material, you engage your mind and prepare it for learning. You're far more likely to retain information when you're actively looking for it.

## Step 3: Read

Now read the document, one section at a time. Make a note of anything that you don't understand – you can use these notes later on, when you explore related materials.

You may find that this read-through takes more time than you expect, especially if the information is dense or complex.

Keep yourself focused by turning every subheading or chapter title into a question that you must answer before you move on. For example, you could turn the subtitle, "The Advantages of SQ3R" into the question, "What are the advantages of SQ3R?" and run through the answer in your mind before you move onto the next part of the text.

### Tip:

While you're reading, use **Mind Maps®** or **Cornell Note Taking** to take notes on important concepts, and to record your reactions to what you're reading. Alternatively (and if you own the document) you can "read actively" by underlining important passages or by using a highlighter pen to show key points.

## Step 4: Recall

Once you've read the appropriate sections of the document, run through it in your mind several times. Identify the important points, and then work out how other information fits around them.

Then, go back to your questions from Step 2, and try to answer them from memory. Only turn back to the text if you're unable to answer a question this way.

## Step 5: Review

Once you can recall the information, you can start to review it.

First, reread the document or your notes. This is especially important if you don't feel confident that you've understood all of the information.

Then discuss the material with someone else – this is a highly effective method of reviewing information. Explain what you have just learned as comprehensively as you can, and do your best to put the information into a context that's meaningful for your team, organization, or industry.

Finally, schedule regular reviews of the material to keep it fresh in your mind. Do this after a week, after a month, and after several months – this helps to embed the material into your long-term memory.

### Tip:

If you don't have the chance to discuss your learning face to face, consider keeping a blog or creating fact sheets to outline what you've learned.

## Making SQ3R a Habit

At first, SQ3R may feel time-consuming. However, the more you use it, the less you'll have to think about the process.

To turn this reading technique into a **habit**, use it each time you need to read something in detail. At first, allow extra time to get into the habit of using the five steps, and look for opportunities to discuss what you've learned with colleagues.

## Key Points

SQ3R is five-step technique that you can use to learn more effectively, and to increase your retention of written information. It helps you to focus what you need from a document, and to create a clear structure for the information in your mind.

SQ3R's step are:

1. Survey.
2. Question.
3. Read.
4. Recall.
5. Review.

You can use SQ3R whether you're reading online or on paper. It can take extra time to follow the five steps at first, but you'll find that if you make the effort, you'll learn and retain significantly more.

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