

# HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TEXTBOOKS

## Link the textbook to your class work

Read the relevant section of the textbook before the lecture or practical session. This will help you to understand what the lecturer is talking about, and to take clearer notes.

*Soon after* the lecture read and compare your lecture notes with the relevant section of the textbook.

Run quickly over the previous sections of the textbook before starting a new section. This will help you see the new material in context.

## Identify the broad issues

Before you read a chapter, scan it to identify the broad issues and to get a rough picture of what's coming. Doing this will help you absorb and remember information when you do your detailed reading. Take note of:

- the chapter title
- the chapter objectives and/or any introductory statement of the aims of the chapter
- major headings, subheadings, margin definitions and in-chapter reviews
- any concluding summary of the main points of the chapter along with key terms
- illustrations
- material typeset in a special way - perhaps in bold type or a different colour, or in a box or separate section

## Absorb and organise the material

Once you've scanned a chapter you're ready to read it properly. You should be trying to *absorb information by fitting it into a logical structure*. You want to be able to remember not only the key points, but also how they fit together. Here are some suggestions:

- ***Feel the rhythm of the language-*** the way the author builds a paragraph out of pieces of information, explanations, lists of points and even questions. Once you get on the author's wavelength you will find it easier to absorb what is being said.
- ***Identify the main points*** Look for the topic sentence in each paragraph and use the topic sentences to help you sort out the main points in the section or chapter that you're looking at.
- ***Look carefully at the illustrations*** They give your concentration an enjoyable break, and they help you retain information. Recalling the illustration helps you recall the related text.
- ***Mentally summarise the main ideas on each page before you turn to the next one*** A pause for this purpose at the end of each page helps you absorb what you have just read.

- ***Summarise the main ideas in each chapter*** It's worth making written notes. If you can later remember the framework of the information you should also be able to recall a lot of the detail that went with it.

## **Mark up the textbook**

The textbook is a tool. Here's how to make it more useful when you come to revise.

- jot down notes and related ideas in the margin (including reasons why you disagree with the author).
- Underline key phrases and sentences, perhaps putting numbers in the margin beside the key points.
- Summarise the key points (in your own words) at the top and bottom of the page.
- Think about how different marks or colours can be used for different things.
- Don't highlight or underline everything....it defeats the purpose.

Highlighting text helps you revise. It forces you to focus on the key points. It provides you with a summary for revision purposes. Individual students do it differently. That's why it's easier to revise from a textbook you have marked up yourself.