

# SQ3R: Active Learning for Everyone

M. E. Kabay, PhD, CISSP-ISSMP

Associate Professor, Information Assurance, Division of Business & Management  
MSIA Program Director, School of Graduate Studies  
Norwich University, Northfield, VT 05663-1035 USA

At Norwich, we recommend that you use the SQ3R methodology throughout your work to increase the effectiveness of your studies. The acronym stands for “Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review” and describes a systematic approach to making full use of your time when reading any technical material. There are many descriptions of this method on the Web; you can find hundreds by entering “SQ3R” into any search engine. The Norwich University Learning Center will also help you with additional resources about this method of active learning. A brief summary of the method is as follows:

## **Survey:**

Survey the document: scan the contents, introduction, chapter introductions and chapter summaries to pick up a general impression of the text. Leaf through the entire text quickly (this may take you an hour) and let your eyes glance over each page. Allow yourself to look at pictures or diagrams and to read any figure captions or highlighted words. Let yourself become curious. Make notes on any questions that occur to you (see below in the Question section). This is not reading: you are just starting to build a framework of associations that will help you assimilate the information you will study.

## **Question:**

Throughout your survey and as you read the material, write down questions that come to mind. Not only are you maintaining an active stance in your studies as you do this, but you are building a stockpile of test questions that will help you check your own comprehension later.

## **Read:**

The trick here is to read one paragraph at a time. The paragraph is the logical unit of thought (if the writer has any sense) and you can best master the information presented in this fashion. Read a paragraph and then immediately move to the Recite phase.

## **Recite:**

No, this is not memorization. You look up from the paragraph you have just read and ask yourself, “What have I read?” Just summarize the main point(s) in your own words. The Read-Recite cycle turns passive recognition of knowledge (“Oh yeah, I read that”) into active knowledge (“This is what it means.”) You need active knowledge to be successful in any course.

## **Review:**

Consolidate your new knowledge. Review the main points you’ve learned after every study session. Check your own or the teacher’s review questions to check your knowledge. Go back to your study materials and fill in the holes if necessary. Then later, at the end of the day and the end of the week, repeat your review to help solidify your associative memory and to continue the process of making the knowledge your own.

See also *How to Read a Book* by Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren (1972). Touchstone (ISBN 0671212095). AMAZON link < <http://tinyurl.com/7ab3r> >. For additional references, type SQ3R into a search engine’s search field.