

A WORD TO THE STUDENT

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS AND OTHER COURSES

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Effective Study: An Introduction

This essay contains tips to help you become a more successful student. It contains a number of specific suggestions for this course, but it also covers many techniques that will be of help in all your college courses: reading your course textbooks, studying, and taking exams. If you learn these techniques early in your college career, you increase your chances of success over the long haul. You will be able to locate important information more effectively, understand lectures better, and probably do better on tests. By understanding the material better, you will not only gain a better understanding of sociology, but might well find that you are able to enjoy your class more.

The Problem: Passive Reading

Do you believe reading is one-way communication? Do you expect the author's facts will become apparent if you only read hard enough or long enough? If so, you have a lot of company - many students feel this way. Do you believe the writer has buried critical material in the text some-where, and that you need only find and highlight it to get all that's important? And do you believe that if you can memorize these highlighted details, you will do well on tests? If so, then you are probably a passive reader.

The problem with passive reading is that it makes even potentially interesting writing boring. Passive reading reduces a chapter to individual, frequently unrelated facts instead of providing understanding of important concepts. It seldom digs beneath the surface, relying on literal meaning rather than sensing implications. Since most college testing relies on understanding of key concepts rather than simple factual recall, passive reading fails to significantly help students to do well in courses.

The Solution: Active Reading

Active reading is recognizing that a textbook should provide two-way communication. It involves knowing what aids are available to help understand the text and then using them to find the meaning. It involves pre-reading and questioning. It includes recording of questions, vocabulary learning, and summarizing. Still, with all of these techniques, active reading frequently takes less time and produces significantly better results than passive reading.

As an active reader, how should you approach your textbook? Here are some techniques for reading text chapters that you should consider.

1. Think first about what you know.

Read the title of your chapter; then ask yourself what experiences you have had that relate to that title. For example, if the title is "Social Groups and Organizations," ask yourself, "In what ways have I interacted with others in social organizations? Have I ever been part of a social group? If so, what do I remember about the experience?" Answers to these questions personalize the chapter by making it relate to your experiences. They provide a background for the chapter, which experts say improves your chances of understanding the reading. They also show that you do know something about the chapter so that its content won't be so alien.

2. Review the learning objectives on the web.

Not all textbooks or study guides provide learning objectives as this one does but, where available, they can be a valuable study aid. Learning objectives are stated in behavioral terms — they tell you what you should be able to *do* when you finish the chapter. Ask yourself questions about the tasks suggested

in each learning objective and then read to find the information needed to accomplish that task. For instance, if a learning objective states “Explain how variations in the size of groups affect what goes on within them,” then you’ll want to ask yourself something like “How do groups vary in size?” and “How does each variation affect interaction within the group?”

3. **Prior to reading the textbook chapter, read the Chapter Review at the end of the textbook chapter or the Chapter Summary on the web as an index to important terms and ideas.** A chapter summary can be a great benefit for you since the summary includes all the points you need to understand. In the textbook the review is organized by questions – the same proven study technique discussed above. The web summary is briefer and written in narrative form. Whichever you use, you may find items in the summary you know already. You may be able to read more quickly through sections covering these items. Some items you may not know anything about. This tells you where to spend your reading time. **A good rule:** Study most what you know least.
4. **Pay attention to your chapter outline.** This textbook, like most other college textbooks, has an outline at the beginning of each chapter. If you do nothing else besides reading the summary and going through this outline before reading the chapter, you will be far ahead of most students because you will be clued in on what is important. The outline indicates the way ideas are organized in the chapter and how those ideas relate to one another. Certain ideas are indented to show that they are subsets or parts of a broader concept or topic. Knowing this can help you organize information as you read. In addition, on the web you will find a Detailed Chapter Outline

which serves the same purpose as a chapter summary, but organized in a different form. In the Detailed Chapter Outline critical terms for the chapter appear in boldface; clicking on them brings up their definition.

5. **Question as you read.** Turn your chapter title into a question, then read up to the first heading to find your answer. The answer to your question will be the main idea for the entire chapter. In forming your question make sure it contains the chapter title. For example, if the chapter title is “The Sociological Perspective and Research Process,” your question might be “What is the sociological perspective?” or “What research process does sociology use?” or “Why do you need research methods to do sociology?” As you go through the chapter, turn each heading into a question, then read to find the answer. Most experts say that turning chapter headings into questions is a *most valuable step* in focusing reading on important information. Diana Kendall, the author of your textbook, understands this important learning technique. That is why she has generated a list of Chapter Focus Questions at the beginning of each chapter. You may want to use these questions as a starting point, since you know that they will point you toward the most important material in a section. However, it is also a good idea to form your own questions to get into practice for books not containing this helpful aid. A good technique might be to make your own question, then to check it against the questions provided in the text before reading. In any case, use a question, then highlight your answer in the text. This will be the most important information under each heading. Don’t read as if every word is important; focus on finding answers.

- 6. Pay attention to graphic aids.** As you read, note those important vocabulary words appearing in bold type. Find the definitions for these words and highlight them. These terms will be important to remember. A list of all the key terms in each chapter appears at the end of the chapter, with references to the page on which the term is defined. Definitions can be found in the on-line glossary as well. Each chapter has a box with a Sociology and Everyday Life quiz. You can take this quiz in the book or on-line. You may well find some of the answers surprising. You will then be motivated to read to find out more about this sociological issue. Pay attention to photos and photo captions. They make reading easier because they provide a visualization of important points in the textbook. If you can visualize what you read, you will ordinarily retain material better than people who don't use this technique. Along this line, you will find on the web a Visual Overview of each chapter, which is a set of PowerPoint slides. These should be particularly useful if you are a visual learner. Special boxed sections usually give detailed research information about one or more studies related to a chapter heading. For in-depth knowledge, read these sections, but only after completing the section to which they refer. The main text will provide the background for a better understanding of the research, and the visualization provided by the boxed information will help illuminate the text discussion.
- 7. When in doubt, use clues to find main ideas.** It is possible that, even using the questioning technique, there could be places where you are uncertain if you're getting the important information. You have clues both in the text and on the web to help you through such places. In the text, it helps to know that main ideas in paragraphs occur more frequently at the beginning and end. Watch for repeated words or ideas—these are clues to important information. Check examples; any point that the author uses examples to document is important. Be alert for key words (such as *first*, *second*, *clearly*, *however*, *although*, and so on); these also point to important information. Names of researchers (except for those named only within parentheses) will almost always be important.
- 8. Use the study aids on the web.** The publisher has provided a set of audio flashcards for each chapter of the book. (It is always a good idea to make up flashcards and carry them with you wherever you go. You can always study them at odd moments.) Whether you are an aural or a visual learner, these cards should be useful in mastering the basic vocabulary. The crossword puzzles and the sociology game show (similar to Jeopardy™) provide some fun ways to identify areas of confusion and to reinforce your learning. Again, the key is that you are actively processing the material. This is a guaranteed recipe for learning.
- 9. Review right after reading.** Most forgetting takes place in the first day after reading. A review right after reading is your best way to hold text material in your memory. If a brief review is all you have time for, return to the Learning Objectives on the web. Can you do the things listed in the objectives? If so, you probably know your material. If not, check the objective and reread the related chapter section to get a better understanding. It is also a good idea to review the Questions for Critical Thinking at the end of each chapter. One key objective of sociology—and indeed of most college courses—is to help you develop critical thinking skills. Though basic information may change from year to

year as new scientific discoveries are made, the ability to think critically in any field is important. If you get in the habit of going beyond surface knowledge in sociology, you can transfer these skills to other areas. This can be a great benefit not only while you're in school but afterwards as well. These questions also provide the kind of background that is extremely useful for essay exams.

Guidelines for Effective Reading of Your Textbook

1. Think first about what you know.
2. Review the learning objectives on the web.
3. Prior to reading the textbook chapter, read the Chapter Review at the end of the textbook chapter or the Chapter Summary on the web as an index to important terms and ideas.
4. Pay attention to your chapter outline.
5. Question as you read.
6. Pay attention to graphic aids.
7. When in doubt, use clues to find main ideas.
8. Use the study aids on the web.
9. Review right after reading.

Functioning Effectively in Class

Before you can function effectively in class, you must do something else: **BE THERE!** While no one may take attendance or force you to be present, studies show that you have a significantly greater chance of succeeding in your class if you attend regularly. Lecture material is generally important — and it is given only once. If you miss a lecture, in-class discussion, game, or simulation, there is no really effective way to make it up.

Assuming you are present, there are two ways of participating in your sociology

class: actively and passively. Passive participation involves sitting there, not contributing, waiting for the instructor to tell what is important. Passive participation takes little effort, but it is unlikely to result in much learning. Unless you are actively looking for what is significant, the likelihood of finding the important material or of separating it effectively from what is less meaningful is not great. The passive student runs the risk of taking several pages of unneeded notes, or of missing key details altogether.

Active students **begin each class period with a question.** “What is this class going to be about today?” They find an answer to that question, usually in the first minute, and use this as the key to important material throughout the lecture or other activity. Look for an outline or title on the board, an overhead, or a PowerPoint slide.

When there is a point active students don't understand, they **ask questions.** They know that many other students probably have similar questions, but are afraid to ask. Asking questions allows you to help others while helping yourself. Active students also know that what seems a small point today may be critical to understanding a future lecture. Such items also have a way of turning up on tests. If **classroom discussion** is called for, active students are quick to **join in.** And the funny thing is, they frequently wind up enjoying their sociology class as they learn.

Effective Studying

As you study your sociology text and notes, both the method you use and the time picked for study will have effects on comprehension. Establishing an effective study routine is important. Without a routine, it is easy to put off study — and put it off, and put it off...until it is too late. To be most effective, follow the few simple steps listed below.

1. When possible, **study at the same time and place each day.** Doing this makes

use of psychological conditioning to improve study results. “Because it is 7:00 p.m. and I am sitting at my bedroom desk, I realize it is time to begin studying sociology.”

2. **Study in half-hour blocks with five minute breaks.** Long periods of study without breaks frequently reduce comprehension to the 40 percent level. That is most inefficient. By using short periods (about 30 minutes) followed by short breaks, you can move that comprehension rate into the 70 percent range. Note that if 30 minutes end while you are still in the middle of text section, you should go on to the end of that section before stopping.
3. For even more efficient study, **review frequently.** Take about a minute at the end of each study session to mentally review what you’ve studied so far. When you start the next study session, spend the first minute or two rehearsing in your mind what you studied in the previous session. This weaves a tight webbing in which to catch new associations. Long-term retention of material is aided by frequent review, about every two weeks. A ten-minute review planned on a regular basis saves on study time for exams and insures that you will remember needed material. Another useful way to review is to try to explain difficult concepts or the chapter learning objectives to someone else. One problem students often have is that, while studying and reviewing the material by themselves they *think* they know it, only to have that knowledge desert them at the time of the exam. Trying to explain something to someone else forces us to be clear about key points and to discover and articulate the relationship among the components of an idea. Ask your friends or family to bear with you as you try to explain the

material. After all, they will learn something as well!

4. **Don’t mix study subjects.** Do all of your sociology work before moving on to another course. Otherwise, your study can result in confusion of ideas and relationships within materials studied.
5. Finally, **reward yourself** for study well done. Think of something you like to do, and do it when you finish studying for the day. This provides positive reinforcement, which makes for continued good study.

Guidelines for Effective Functioning in Class

1. Begin each class period with a question.
2. Ask questions frequently.
3. Join in classroom discussion.

Guidelines for Effective Studying

1. When possible, study at the same time and place each day.
2. Study in half-hour blocks with five-minute breaks.
3. Review frequently.
4. Don’t mix study subjects.
5. Reward yourself when you’re finished.

Successfully Taking Tests

Tests are one of the ways you can demonstrate to yourself and to the instructor that you really know the material. The trouble is, few people have learned how to take tests effectively. And knowing how to take tests effectively makes a significant difference in exam scores. Here are a few tips to improve your test-taking skills.

Studying for Tests

1. **Think before you study.** All material is not of equal value. What did the instructor emphasize in class? What was covered in a week? A day? A few minutes? Were any chapters emphasized more than others? Which learning objectives did your instructor stress? Review the Key Concepts in your textbook for important people and terms. Which of these were given more emphasis by your instructor? Use these clues to decide where to spend *most* of your study time.
2. **Begin study a week early.** When you start early, if you encounter material you don't know you have time to find answers. If you see that you know blocks of material already, you have saved yourself time in future study sessions. You also avoid much of the forgetting that occurs with last-minute cramming.
3. **Put notes and related chapters together for study.** Integrate the material as much as possible, perhaps by writing it out in a single, comprehensive format. A related technique is to visualize the material on the pages of the text. As you study, don't stop for material that you don't know. Study what you already know. Once you are sure you have mastered that material, go back to what you don't know yet. There is no need to study again what you already know. Put it aside, and concentrate on the unknown.
4. **Take practice tests.** When you have completed your studying, take the appropriate practice tests on the web for each chapter. Tests include true/false and multiple-choice questions. Taking the practice tests contains a double benefit. First, if you get a good score on the tests, you know that you understand the material. Second, since the format of

the practice test is very similar to that of actual tests, you should develop confidence in your ability to succeed in course tests from doing well on the practice tests. If your course tests include essay questions, you should, in addition to the practice test essays, use the Learning Objectives and Questions for Critical Thinking to prepare and practice focused, in-depth answers.

Taking the Test

1. **Don't come early; don't come late.** Early people tend to develop anxieties; late people lose test time. Studies show that people who discuss test material with others just before a test may forget that material on the test. This is another reason that arriving too early puts students in jeopardy. Get there about two or three minutes early. Repeat to yourself as you get ready for the test, "I can do it. I will do it!" Visualize yourself successfully completing the test. This will set a positive mental tone for the test and increases your chances for success.
2. **Be sure that you understand all the directions before you start answering.** Not following directions is *the biggest cause* for lost points on tests. Ask about whatever you don't understand. The points you save will be your own.
3. **Read through the test, carefully answering only items you know.** Be sure you read every word and every answer choice as you go. Use a piece of paper or a card to cover the text below the line you are reading. This can help you focus on each line individually — and increase your test score. Speed creates a serious problem in testing. The mind is moving so fast that it is easy to overlook key words such as *except*, *but*, *best example*, and so on. Frequently, multiple choice questions will contain two close options, one of which is

correct, while the other is partly correct. Moving too fast without carefully reading items causes people to make wrong choices in these situations. Slowing your reading speed makes for higher test scores. If you don't know the answer to a question, skip it and move on. (And don't stress about it!) The mind tends to work subconsciously on questions you've read but left unanswered. As you're doing questions later in the test, you may suddenly have the answer for an earlier question. In such cases, go to that question and answer it right away. These sudden insights quickly disappear and may never come again.

4. **Now that you've answered what you know, look carefully at the other questions.** Eliminate alternatives you know are wrong, and then *guess*. Unless you are penalized for guessing, never leave a blank on a test. You do not have a 25 percent chance when you guess on a four-item multiple choice question, but you have a chance. And *a* chance is better than *no* chance.
5. **If you finish early, stay to check answers.** Speed causes many people to give answers that a moment's hesitation would show to be wrong. Read over your choices, especially those for questions that caused you trouble. *Don't change answers* because you suddenly feel one choice is better than others. Studies show that this is usually a bad strategy. However, if you see a mistake, or have genuinely remembered new information, change your answer.
6. **Don't be distracted by other test takers.** Some people become very anxious because of the noise and movement of other test takers. This is most apparent when several people begin to leave the room after finishing their tests. Try to sit where you will be

least apt to see or interact with other test takers. Usually this means sitting toward the front of the room and close to the wall furthest from the door. Turn your chair slightly toward the wall, if possible. The more you insulate yourself from distractions during the test, the better off you will be. Don't panic when other students finish their exam before you do. Accuracy is always more important than speed. Work at your own pace and budget your time appropriately. For a timed test, always be aware of the time remaining. This means that, if a clock is not visible in the classroom, you need to have your own wristwatch. Take as much of the available time as you need to do an accurate and complete job. Remember, your grade will be based upon the answers you give, and not on whether you were the first — or the last — to turn in your exam.

7. **When you get your test back, use it as a learning experience.** Diagnosing a test after it is returned to you is one of the most effective strategies for improving your performance in a course. What kind of material was on the test: theories, problems, straight facts? Where did the material come from: book, lecture, or both? The same kind of material taken from the same source(s) will almost certainly be on future tests. Look at each item you got wrong. Why is it wrong? If you know why you made mistakes, you are unlikely to make the same ones in future. Look at the overall pattern of your errors. Did you make most of your mistakes on material from the lectures? Perhaps you need to improve your note-taking technique. Did your errors occur mostly on material from the readings? Perhaps you need to pay more attention to main idea clues and highlight text material more effectively. Were the questions you got wrong evenly distributed between in-

class and reading material? Perhaps you need to learn to study more effectively, and/or to take steps to reduce test anxiety. Following these steps can make for more efficient use of textbooks, better note-taking, higher test scores, and better course grades.

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A Final Word

As you can see, the key to success lies in becoming an active student. Managing time, questioning at the start of lectures, planning effective measures to increase test scores, and using all aids available to make reading and study easier are all elements in becoming an active student. The study aids

for this textbook have been specially designed to help you be that active student. Being passive may seem easier, but it is not. Passive students spend relatively similar amounts of time but learn less. Their review time is likely to be inefficient. Their test scores are more frequently lower — and they usually have less fun in their classes.

Active students are more effective than passive ones. The danger in becoming an active student is that activity is contagious; if you become an active student in sociology, it is hard not to practice the same active learning techniques in English and math as well. Once you start asking questions in your textbook and using your study aids, you may find that you start asking questions in class as well. As you acquire a greater understanding of your subject, you may find that you enjoy your class more — as well as learn more and do better on tests. That is the real danger in becoming an active learner. It is a challenge we strongly encourage you to meet.

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