

January 1990

Notetaking While Reading a Textbook

Toni S. Walters

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj>

Recommended Citation

Walters, Toni S. (1990) "Notetaking While Reading a Textbook," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 23 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol23/iss1/10>

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Reading Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.



Notetaking While Reading a Textbook

by Toni S. Walters

Many teachers and students agree about the benefits of taking effective notes during class lectures and discussions. Proponents of direct instruction of metacognitive strategies also regard notetaking as important. Whether listening or reading, effective notetaking aids the learning process. Some reasons for this are:

- Notetaking encourages organization of information.
- The learner must focus thinking and attention to comprehend.
- Memorization is aided by the writing.
- Notes provide easily reviewable materials for class discussions, tests, and quizzes.

Undoubtedly, in-text notations such as writing margin notes and questions, underlining, highlighting, or starring key information are excellent methods for responding to text while reading. Yet, obvious cost factors make these methods prohibitive for the many students who use school owned books. Thus, taking notes on paper during reading may be the preferred method for student interaction with the text. Traditionally, many teachers direct students to outline chapters in textbooks. While some texts lend themselves nicely to an outline format, others do not. In the latter cases, the text structure makes it difficult for the

reader to determine the II following the I, or the B following the A, or the 2 following the 1. Consequently, the attempt to outline, which is not the primary purpose of reading the text, becomes a frustrating experience for the reader.

This article presents four notetaking alternatives to outlining and in-text notations. These four notetaking variations: (1) make use of bold headings; (2) turn bold headings into questions; (3) organize and clarify written responses to teacher-made or textbook questions; and (4) organize vocabulary words. Notes are done on a 1/3 - 2/3 page format. Such a page set-up is similar to the Cornell and Verbatim split page methods used for notetaking while listening. The format facilitates active reading of textbook assignments and at the same time results in a usable study guide for review and self testing.

Getting set-up. Initially, direct students to fold the notebook paper or draw a line to form a left column approximately 1/3 the width of the writing paper and a right column 2/3 the width of the writing paper. Students should also be instructed to date notes, write the section or chapter number, title, and page numbers on the top line, and only write on one side of the paper.

(1) Use the bold headings

Informational textbook structure generally contains bold headings, subheadings, bold print, and italicized words which highlight or guide the information presented. These same obvious cues can be used by the reader to guide notetaking. As the reader gets to each heading or subheading, that information is written in the left 1/3 column. After reading the section which follows, the reader summarizes the information using words, phrases, or sentences in the right column. Complete sentences are generally not necessary when taking notes. Any bold face or italicized words included under a heading are also written in the left column with the appropriate defining or clarifying information written next to it in the right column.

(2) Turn bold headings into questions

The question step of SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) recommends the reader turn bold headings into questions. Those questions are answered during reading. By using the 1/3 - 2/3 format, the questions are written in the left column and the responses acquired during reading are put in the right column. The page format facilitates the reader's recite and review processes.

(3) Organize and clarify written responses to teacher-made or textbook questions

Often students must respond to teacher-made questions or text questions at the end of the passage, section or chapter. Two options are recommended to deal with questions. The first is to write the question in the left column with the response information in the right column. The

second option is to turn the question into an open ended statement stem and write the stem in the left column. The information necessary to complete the statement is written in the right column.

(4) Organize vocabulary words

Frequently vocabulary lists are a part of English, natural science, social science, mathematics, industrial arts, computer science, business, foreign language, and home economics courses. Again, the 1/3 - 2/3 format facilitates organization. Write the word in the left column and the definition in the right column. All other pertinent information related to the nature of the vocabulary study for the course is also written in the right column. That could be information such as the part of speech, sentences, variant forms of the word, synonyms, and antonyms.

How to use the notes for study, review, and to self test. The 1/3 - 2/3 format, with writing on one side of the paper makes the notes a usable study guide. The information to the left identifies the key concepts or terms, and the right column contains the pertinent information about those concepts and terms. Consequently, the format facilitates review because either the left or right columns can be covered enabling the learner to self test. Whether a bound notebook or a looseleaf is used, limiting notes to one side of the page helps the learner to focus while reviewing and self-testing.

When notes are taken on loose leaf paper, the information from an entire section, chapter, or unit may be laid overlapping so that all the left columns (containing key concepts and terms) are in view. This allows the learner to see the total picture of the information from that portion of the textbook.

Figure 1

Quick Guide: Four Note Taking Variations

(1) Name
Date

○ Chapter/section # + Title
pages

Bold Headings

subheadings

bold print words

italicized words

○

○

(2) Name
Date

○ Chapter/section # + Title
pages:

Turn bold headings
into questions

Answers are written
next to the question
in this column.

○

○

(3) Name
Date

○ Chapter/section # + Title
pages:

Teacher or textbook
questions

(ex) What is the scientific
method? answer to question here

○ Turn question into
open ended statement
stem

(ex) The steps of the
scientific method are: complete statement here

○

(4) Name
Date

○ Chapter/section # + Title
pages:

vocabulary word = definition

- part of speech
- various forms
- synonyms
- antonyms

content vocabulary

○ (ex) monarchy = definition

- examples:

foreign language vocab.

(ex) à côté de = beside, by

ça ne fait rien = that makes no difference

la chambre à coucher:
Chambre = bedroom

○

Teach notetaking concurrently with content. Students' notetaking skills should not be left to chance. Learning how to take notes, a valuable metacognitive strategy, can and should be taught concurrently with content reading assignments. Teacher modeling, teacher samples, and teacher guidance of student practice of notetaking are prerequisite to the expectation that students generate notes during independent study reading.

Additionally, it is important to dignify students' notetaking efforts while students are learning how. Too often, high school students report they do not get credit for their notes and they do nothing with the notes once they take them. Beyond the verbal rhetoric of the intrinsic values of taking notes and keeping an organized notebook, teachers can provide incentives for students to reap some extrinsic rewards or applause while they acquire and develop notetaking savvy. Periodically, give an open-note quiz or test. In such cases, a student's notes, not the textbook, may be used.

Another way to motivate students is to give grade book credit or points, not valueless checks, for notebook assignments. Still other possibilities include allowing students to use notes generated during independent reading for in-class content writing such as summaries, critical analyses, and application or situational responses. It is human nature for one to acquire an intrinsic value for an activity or process only after multiple and repetitive experiences have been nurtured with extrinsic rewards. Such is the rationale for asking teachers to dignify students efforts by requiring students to apply the strategies taught in class.

DR. TONI S. WALTERS is an Associate Professor in the Reading and Language Arts Department at Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan