

Learning Strategies for IB/AP History

I. Reading Strategies

A. **Reading Environment:** There are many things that can interfere with effective reading. A poor physical setting can make reading far more difficult than it has to be.

1. **Lighting:** Often it is helpful to do the reading - the bulk of it, at least - in the same place. Check the lighting there. Is it adequate? You should be able to see the page without strain. Either extreme, too much light or too little, can cause strain and fatigue, and lower reading efficiency.
2. **Ventilation:** Stuffy rooms can put you to sleep. There should be plenty of fresh air and the temperature should be fairly cool.
3. **Reading Position:** Your reading position should be neither too comfortable nor too uncomfortable. The first condition can put you to sleep. An uncomfortable position can create a strain, however subtle, which results in fatigue.
4. **Distractions:** Most importantly, your reading environment should contain as few distractions as possible. Tests show that most students can only pay attention to one thing at a time. This means you should avoid sitting near a door or window and having a radio, CD player, or television playing while reading.

B. SQ3R Method for Effective Reading

1. **Survey:** Look over the material critically. Skim through the chapter and read each boldface heading and subheading. This allows you to organize your mind before you begin to read so that you can build a structure for the thoughts and details to come. Read the summary at the end of chapter.
2. **Questions:** Instead of reading paragraph headings such as "Basic Concepts of Reading," change the heading to read, "What are the Basic Concepts of Reading?" These questions will become "hooks" on which to hang the reading material. Write these questions out; look over the questions to see the emphasis and direction. The better the questions, the better your comprehension is likely to be. Attempt to give plausible answers before further reading. When your mind is actively searching for answers to questions it becomes engaged in learning.
3. **Read:** Read one section at a time with your questions in mind. Look for the answers, and notice if you need to make up some new questions.
4. **Recall:** After each section - stop, recall your questions, and see if you can answer them from memory. If not, look back again (as often as necessary) but don't go on to the next section until you can successfully recall and recite the information. This forces you to think, check for understanding, and points out what content you do not understand. More time should be spent on recall than on reading.
5. **Review:** Once you've finished the entire chapter using the preceding steps, go back over all the questions from all the headings. See if you can still answer them. If not, look back and refresh your memory, then continue. Fix carefully in your mind the logical sequence of the entire idea, concept, or problem. Finish up with a mental picture of the WHOLE.

C. Note-taking Method for Effective Reading

1. **Read:** Read one section of the chapter - just enough to keep an understanding of the material. Although it is tempting, DO NOT take notes as you are reading the first time. You are likely to take down too much information and simply copy without understanding.

2. **Review:** Identify the main ideas as well as the sub-points. Set the book aside and paraphrase the information. Putting the textbook information into your own words forces you to become actively involved in the material.
3. **Write:** Write the paraphrased ideas as your notes. Do not copy directly from the book. Add only enough detail to understand.

D. Concept Mapping for Effective Reading

1. **Read:** Read the title, the introduction, and the conclusion of the chapter. Next read the title, the introduction again, all sub-headings, and the conclusion again. Read the title, the introduction one more time, the subheadings, the topic sentence of each paragraph, any italicized or boldfaced words, lists, and the conclusion. Force yourself to complete this step in less than 25 minutes.
2. **Map:** Close your textbook. Make a Concept map of all you can remember in the chapter. Do not stop until at least half an hour is up, even if you feel that you can't possibly remember any more - more will surface if you give yourself the time. DO NOT REFER TO THE TEXT WHILE YOU ARE DOING THIS. If you come to a dead end, try alternative memory techniques to the ones you have been using: associating ideas, either from within the section itself or from other related material; visualizing pages, pictures, graphs etc.; recalling personal associations that may have come to mind; staring out the window and blanking out your thoughts; and so on. This is strenuous, but it is rewarding. It will show you exactly how much you have learned of what you have read. Give yourself a lot of time to do this, and you will probably be surprised at how much you actually can recall, and at how you can use all sorts of different strategies for remembering. You should also be noting down questions about things you have forgotten, so you can look them up. When you are finished, you should try to figure out how all the material you have remembered fits together – not necessarily as it is presented in the book, but as it is organized in your own thinking. Note down your opinions of it, questions about it, disagreements with it, and so on.
3. **Review:** Check through the text and fill in any important information that you missed. Use a different color of ink or some other way to mark this material that you forgot, so you can study it later. At this point, you may wish to read through the entire chapter as you normally would, to make sure you did not miss anything. Then do another Map, from memory, to check whether you have learned the new material.

II. Note Taking Strategies

A. Cornell Method

1. **Prepare:** Keep up with your reading so that the lecture material is familiar and makes sense to you. Use a loose-leaf notebook so that you can rearrange pages and add in handouts where they belong. Always title and date your notes. Divide each page into two columns.
2. **Record:** Take notes in the right column. Try to use your own words. Use keywords. You do not have the time to write complete sentences. Use as many abbreviations as possible. Use various notations (stars, arrows, brackets, etc.) to identify main ideas and important details. Write legibly. If you miss something or fall behind, leave a space and move on. Get the missing information from a classmate or your teacher later on.
3. **Reduce:** As soon as possible after the lecture use the left column to record the key words, phrases, questions, etc. from the lecture. You may also use this column to link information from the text or other sources to the lecture material.
4. **Recite:** Cover the note taking area. Using only the cue words from the left column, recite the facts and ideas from the lecture as fully as you can in your own words. Then verify what you have said.
5. **Reflect:** Think about the lecture material. Draw conclusions. Develop your own opinions. Analyze how the material relates to what you knew before. Reflection will help prevent ideas from becoming inert and soon forgotten.

6. **Review:** Summarize the notes at the bottom of each page or summarize the entire lecture on the last page of notes you took. To retain the information review your notes daily for at least 10 – 15 minutes.

III. Memorization Techniques

- Acronyms and Acrostics:** An **acronym** is an invented combination of letters. Each letter is a cue to an idea you need to remember. Example: BRASS is an acronym for how to shoot a rifle--Breath, Relax, Aim, Sight, Squeeze. An **acrostic** is an invented sentence where the first letter of each word is a cue to an idea you need to remember. Example: EVERY GOOD BOY DESERVES FUN is an acrostic to remember the order of G-clef notes on sheet music--E, G, B, D, F.
- Rhyme-Keys:** First, memorize key words that can be associated with numbers. For instance, bun with one; shoe with two, tree with three, door with four, hive with five, etc. Next create an image of the items you need to remember with key words. For example, if you had to remember the four basic food groups - dairy products; meat, fish, and poultry; grains; and fruit and vegetables - imagine cheese on a bun, livestock with shoes on, a sack of grain suspended in a tree, and opening a door to a room stocked with fruits and vegetables.
- Link & Story Methods:** Make associations between items in a list, linking them either with a flowing image containing the items, or with a story featuring them. The flow of the story and the strength of the images give you the cues for retrieval. Taking the first image, create a connection between it and the next item. Then move on through the list linking each item with the next. The Story Method is similar, except that the images are linked together as part of a story. Where a word you want to remember does not trigger strong images, use a similar word that will remind you of that word.
- Journey Method:** Associate information with landmarks on a journey that you know well. This could, for example, be your journey to school in the morning; the route you use to get from class to class; or the route to visit your grandparents.

IV. Test Taking Strategies

A. True/False Questions

1. Every part of a "true" statement must be true.
2. Words like "sometimes, often, frequently, ordinarily, generally" open up the possibilities of making accurate statements. They make more modest claims, are more likely to reflect reality, and usually indicate "true" answers.
3. Words like "no, never, none, always, every, entirely, only" imply the statement must be true 100% of the time and usually indicate false answers.
4. Long sentences often include groups of words set off by punctuation. Pay attention to the "truth" of the phrases. If one is false, it usually indicates a "false" answer.

B. Short Answer Questions

1. Use grammatical clues within the statement for hints to the correct answer
2. A guess made with common sense can earn you more points than leaving an answer blank.
3. If you are unsure about what the question is asking – ask the teacher for clarification.

C. Multiple Choice Questions

1. Answer easy questions first.
2. Cover the options, read the stem, and attempt to answer. Choose the option that best resembles your answer.

3. Eliminate options that you know are incorrect.
4. Question options that grammatically don't fit the stem or are totally unfamiliar to you.
5. Read the stem with each remaining option. Treat each option as a true/false statement. Choose the statement that is most "true."
6. If two options are opposite of each other, then chances are one of them is correct.
7. Don't change your answers unless you realize you have misread the question or you are sure of the correction.