

Skim and Scan Textbook Approach

This strategy is designed to help you better remember material from your textbook. It is based on the premise that most history books are written in outline form: thesis, main headings, sub-headings, topic sentences, and main points. This reading strategy may seem redundant and slower than just reading the chapter. However, if you are frustrated with your seeming inability to remember what you have just read, then this approach may be worth trying.

1. Browsing:

Look through the chapter. Read the headings of the chapter, sections, and sub-sections. Read and look at all of the maps, drawings, paintings, graphs, and charts. Just “look around” at what you will be reading. You may absorb some things, but all you really want is a quick glance. Do not read the chapter at this point. Just look. (15-20 minutes)

2. Skim & Scan:

Read the opening remarks of the chapter. Read the first paragraphs of each section and sub-section. Find the thesis for the chapter and section. Read the first sentence of every other paragraph. Read the captions to the maps, graphs, etc. (30-45 minutes)

3. Careful Reading:

Now, read the chapter from start to finish. Carefully read every sentence and word. Re-read all the captions. Look up any words you do not know. Be sure to spend time reading the whole chapter. Do this in one or, at most, two settings. (45 minutes-3 hours)

4. Skim & Scan With Note-taking:

With pen in hand, Skim & Scan again. Take outline notes with headings matching those in the chapter. Do not rewrite the book. Take quick notes of things you will need to remember. Jot down page numbers of important paragraphs. You may also wish to make flashcards. (1 hour)

5. Reminding:

This is a Skim & Scan technique that uses both the text and your notes. Review your notes to remind you what is in the text. Look back at the text only when you need to. This is a final check before you study for the exam. (30-45 minutes)

The day before the test, do not try to reread entire chapters. Instead, rely on your “Skim & Scan” notes and your lecture notes as well as any homework you did. If you feel the need to return to your textbook, reread the introduction and conclusion to each chapter and the passages that you previously identified in step #4 as being especially important.