

PREVIEWING TEXTBOOK CHAPTERS

Suppose you are invited to a party this Saturday night in an unfamiliar part of your state, and you are very excited about going because all your friends will be there. Unfortunately, you are working until 9 P.M. that night, which means that you have to travel alone and arrive late for the affair.

When Saturday night comes around, you certainly would not get into your car and drive around aimlessly trying to find the party. Not only would you waste time and gas, but there is a real chance you would never arrive! Instead, you would have found out specifically where the party is, the best way to get there, and approximately how long the trip is going to take you. Furthermore, when getting directions, you would have asked for landmarks like traffic lights, service stations, and other structured to help guide your way. In short, you would have tried to become familiar with the route so that you could get to your destination as quickly and efficiently as possible.

We can apply the same principle to reading textbook chapters. Before starting an assignment, you should find out where you are going by familiarizing yourself with the material as much as possible. Not only will it ultimately save time and effort to do this, but it will result in much better comprehension because you know where you are going and what to look for along the way. The process by which you become acquainted with a textbook chapter is called **previewing**. Like overviewing, it involves skimming or quickly glancing over the material to determine what you will be reading about, how it

is organized, and what aids to understanding are provided to help you with the task.

When previewing a textbook chapter, proceed through the following steps:

1. Take note of the title, which tells you the topic of the chapter. Once again, it is the answer to the question “What is this about?”
2. Check the length of the chapter so that you can gauge how long it will take you to read. While you are at it, try to get an idea of how difficult the material is, because that also affects the time it will take you to get through it. The purpose here is for you to prepare yourself psychologically for the task and come up with a schedule for its completion, which could involve dividing up the assignment.
3. Check to see if there are objectives, goals, or outcomes at the beginning of the chapter. They tell you exactly what you are expected to know when you finish reading it, so they can serve as your personal study goals.
4. Skim the first several paragraphs, which are often an introduction to the main points to be covered and sometimes present the central message of the entire chapter.
5. Skim the last several paragraphs, which could serve as a summary of the most important information including, once again, the central message of the chapter. Keep in mind that writers sometimes provide

a more formal summary or review in a separate section at the end of a chapter, which makes it easy to recognize.

6. Skim the major and minor chapter headings so that you become aware of the topics covered and how they are related to one another. As noted earlier, it is important to note connections between major and minor headings.
7. Look carefully at the **graphic aids**, which include charts, graphs, maps, pictures, and tables. They illustrate important information mentioned in the context of the textbook and often sum up major points made by the writer. Pay particular attention to the **captions** or **titles** and any explanations that appear over, under, or alongside the graphic aids, because you want to find out what they are about and be aware of the information that they stress. In short, no matter what graphic aid you encounter, you should always be able to answer the following two questions: “What is this graphic aid about?” and “What are the major points stressed?”
8. Check if there are questions within or at the end of the chapter. Because they also focus on the major points, you should keep any questions in mind and try to answer them as you read. At the very least, they can serve as guides to direct your reading to the most valuable information.

9. Take note of any other aids to understanding offered in the chapter, such as exercises, outlines, previews, vocabulary lists, or boldfaced and italicized vocabulary defined in context or in the margins. All of these aids can help make your reading more meaningful.

After you have completed your preview of a chapter, take a few moments to think carefully about what you have learned. As you read the chapter, remember what you have discovered from your preview so that you can focus on the most important information. Although it only takes a short time, previewing is an excellent way to get acquainted with textbook material. That familiarity will pay off later on by enabling you to read quicker and with much more understanding.

Preview Questions

1. What is the chapter about?
2. How long will it take to read it?
3. Are there objectives, goals, or outcomes at the beginning of the chapter that can serve as your personal study goals?
4. Is an introduction or a summary provided?
5. What is the central message of the entire chapter?
6. How many major and minor headings are there? Name them.
7. How many characteristics of critical thinking are there?
8. Are any graphic aids provided? If so, what are they about? What major point do they stress?
9. Are there questions within or at the end of the chapter?

10. What other aids to understanding are offered in the chapter that can help make your reading more meaningful?

Adapted from *Critical Reading, Critical Thinking*, Richard Pirozzi, Longman