

PREREADING

What is the first thing you do as you begin reading a text assignment? If you are like many students, you first check to see how long it is and then begin to read. Many students do not realize that there is a technique that they can use before they begin to read that will improve their comprehension and recall. This technique, called prereading, is a way to familiarize yourself quickly with the organization and content of the material. You will find that it is one of the easiest techniques to use and one that makes a dramatic difference in your reading efficiency. Prereading involves getting a quick impression or overview of what you are going to read before beginning to read. As a result, you will be able to read faster and follow the author's train of thought more easily. You might think of prereading as similar to looking at a road map before you start out on a drive to an unfamiliar place. The road map, like prereading, gives you an idea of what lies ahead and how it is arranged.

How to Preread

Prereading involves looking only at those parts of the reading material that will tell you what it is about or how it is organized. The portions to look at in reading a textbook chapter are listed below.

1. **Read the Title.** Often the title functions as a label and tells you what the material is about. It establishes the overall topic or subject.
2. **Read the Introduction or Opening Paragraphs.** The first few paragraphs of a piece of writing are usually introductory. The author may explain the subject, outline his or her ideas, or give some clues about his or her direction of thought. If the introduction is long, read only the first two or three paragraphs.
3. **Read Each Boldface Heading.** Headings, like titles, serve as labels and identify the content of the material they head. Together, the headings will form a mini-outline of the important ideas.
4. **Read the First Sentence Under Each Heading.** Although the heading often announces the topic that will be discussed, the first sentence following the heading frequently explains the heading and states the central thought of the passage. In the sample selection, notice that many of the first sentences further explain the heading.
5. **Notice Any Typographical Aids.** The typographical aids include all features of the page that make facts or ideas outstanding or more understandable. These include italics (slanted print), boldface type, marginal notes, colored ink, capitalization, underlining, and enumeration (listing).
6. **Notice Any Graphs or Pictures.** Graphs, charts, and pictures are used for two purposes. First, they emphasize important ideas, and second, they clarify or simplify information and relationships. Therefore, they are always important to notice when you are prereading. The easiest way to establish quickly what important element of the text is being further explained by the graph or picture is to read the caption.
7. **Read the Last Paragraph or Summary.** The last paragraph of a chapter often serves as a conclusion or summary. In some chapters, more than one paragraph may be used for this purpose. In some textbooks, these last few paragraphs may be labeled "Summary" or "Conclusion." By reading the summary before reading the chapter you will learn the general focus and content of the material.