Priming Your Brain: Developing a Purpose for Reading

Before a painter can paint something, she needs to prime it so the paint will stick to the surface. Primer is a sticky, paint-like substance that helps keep paint from flaking off surfaces.

You must also prime your brain before you read to help new information stick to it! It only takes a few minutes before you begin reading, but those few minutes will dramatically increase your comprehension.

Grab one of your text books, find a section to read, and try each of the following steps as you read them.

**Read all pictures and graphs in the entire reading selection.** Look at each picture, read the caption, and ask yourself, “Why is this here?” Look at graphs, tables, and charts and challenge yourself to figure out what the information in those graphics is about (spend approximately 20 seconds per picture or graph).

Purpose

Most pictures and graphs in textbooks are printed in color, which is costly to publish. Therefore, publishing companies carefully select visuals that best summarize the important parts of a topic. In fact, the black-and-white text usually does not describe new points, but simply adds details to the pictures and other visuals.

**Read the questions at the end of the chapter or reading selection.**

Purpose

After “reading” the pictures, you may find that you already know the answers to some of these summary questions. Even if you don’t know the answers, the process of reading the questions help prime your brain with a purpose for reading. This will focus your brain while reading and ultimately increase your speed and comprehension.
Begin reading the text. As you read, turn the headings into questions.

**Purpose**

This process of turning headings into questions, once again, helps keep your brain focused, increasing reading speed and comprehension. It also helps your brain develop connections, which is important for recall.

Pictures are another powerful tool for developing recall because our brains are programmed to remember visual images better than anything else. While you read, the more associations you can make with visuals such as photographs and charts, the more you will understand and remember the content of the text.

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**Time Saving Tip**

Read your text book before your teacher covers each section in class.

This strategy will give you some background knowledge to help you:

1. Stay awake during class because you will actually have a clue about what is going on.
2. Ask educated questions that will enhance your learning and impress your teacher.
3. Save study time by making the most of your class time. If you come to class with some exposure to the topic of discussion, you'll understand lectures with greater ease and you will learn the information much more quickly, dramatically reducing study time at home.

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Answer the questions at the end of the chapter or reading selection.

**Purpose**

Review the summary questions to reinforce what you just learned.

Note: If you are required to answer the summary questions, try to include drawings, symbols, or other visuals with your answers to increase your retention.

If the questions are not assigned, you do not need to write out the answers. (Writing may increase your retention a bit, but it may turn you off to the method.) However, you will benefit from at least imagining a visual representation for each answer.