

BIO 181

Guidelines for Lecture Assignments

Strategies for Reading your Textbook

The following strategies are based on the proposition that you cannot read a chapter in a biology textbook just once and understand it completely. Repetition is a key ingredient in learning the material. Repetition not only provides you with multiple opportunities to be exposed to the material, but also gives you time to digest it. The basic approach is to read for organization and key concepts first, and then to fill in the details with each subsequent reading.

The two strategies described here work best with a chapter or section of text no longer than 25-30 pages. Here's the first strategy:

1. Take no more than 25 minutes to:
 - Read the chapter title, overview, and review (at the end of the chapter)
 - Read the headings and subheadings
 - Read the chapter title, introduction, summary, headings and subheadings again
 - Skim the topic sentence of each paragraph (usually the first or second sentence)
 - Skim italicized or boldfaced words
2. Close your textbook. Take a full 30 minutes to:
 - Write down everything you can remember about what you read in the chapter (make a "mind map"). Each time you come to a dead end, use memory techniques such as associating ideas from your reading to lecture notes or other life experiences, visualizing pages, pictures, or graphs, staring out the window to daydream; letting your mind go blank
 - Figure out how all this material is related. Organize it according to what makes sense in your mind, not necessarily according to how it is organized in the textbook. Write down questions and possible contradictions to check on later
3. Open your textbook. Fill in the blanks in your mind map with a different colored pencil
4. Read the chapter again, this time normally. Make another mind map

A second strategy is:

1. Skim the chapter title, headings, and subheadings for an overview of the chapter content. Write down the headings and subheadings in the form of an outline.

2. Look at your outline and ask yourself the following questions:
 - What is the main topic of this chapter?
 - How do each of the headings relate to the topic?
 - How does each subheading relate to its heading?
3. Read each section, paying special attention to the topic sentence of each paragraph. At the end of each section, summarize the content in your own words. Answer the following questions:
 - What's the point?
 - What do I understand?
 - What is confusing?
4. If you read the assigned pages before the lecture, you can pay attention to the lecture content instead of frantically taking notes.
5. After the lecture, while the information is still fresh in your mind, reread your notes on your reading. Ask yourself:
 - What topics did the instructor emphasize in lecture? Fill in your lecture notes with details from your textbook
 - What material do I understand better now?
 - What questions remain?
6. Remember that each time you read the material, you will learn a little more

(excerpted from *A Student handbook for Writing in Biology* 3rd ed., by Karin Knisely, 2009)

Guidelines for Writing Your Assignment's Answers

Writing is an art. Good writing is difficult and it requires a lot of practice. Writing is a form of communication that speaks out loud about you in multiple ways: your comprehension skills, your logical abilities, your thought processes. In a world dominated by written communication, you will be judged several times a day by the quality of your writing. Make every effort to be a good writer.

Here some guidelines for writing your lecture assignments:

- **Answer the question precisely.** Do not add superfluous information; superfluous information suggests a lack of focus and a desire to impress the reader with quantity rather than quality of writing. Precision not only denotes an understanding of the nature of the question posed to you; it also indicates your ability to express ideas in a clear and succinct fashion
- **Write complete sentences.** Make every effort to produce grammatically correct sentences. Syntax is there for you to help you express ideas more clearly; the more chopped and incomplete a sentence is, the harder is to understand what is that you are trying to communicate with it

- **Answer the question in your own words.** Do not plagiarize. Plagiarism defeats the purpose of any written assignment — improving your reading and writing comprehension skills. Additionally, it is illegal.