Study Reading

A course in reading skills for academic purposes

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PART I  PREPARING TO STUDY

Unit 1  Getting to know your textbook

During your studies, you will learn from your lecturers, your fellow students and from books. Your textbook is one of your most valuable sources of information. It is important that you know how to use it effectively.

This unit aims to develop the reading skills required for:
1. surveying a textbook
2. using an index
3. dealing with word problems

TO MAKE YOU THINK

Task 1 (Individual, then pairs)

Knowing the parts of a textbook is the first step to using it properly. Study this list of some of the parts of a textbook. Try to match the parts with the correct descriptions.

Parts of a textbook

1. front cover
2. title page
3. publishing details
4. preface/introduction
5. acknowledgements
6. contents
7. chapters
8. references
9. glossary
10. index
11. back cover (or dust jacket blurb)

Descriptions

a) the units of the book
b) sources used by the author
c) a list of the main topics by chapter
d) a page containing title and author's name
e) an alphabetical list of topics in detail
f) publisher, place and date of publication
g) selling points, author information, positive reviews
h) thanks to people who have helped with the book
i) the author's aims and the coverage of the book
j) a mini-dictionary of specialist terms used
k) title, author and often an illustration in colour

When you have finished, compare your answers with your neighbour. Use your dictionary to find definitions for these parts:
appendix
bibliography
foreword

Task 2 (Individual, then pairs)

Identify these parts of a textbook (opposite). Then compare your answers with your neighbour.
To make you think

B 1 Introduction
   1.1 The origins of pests 1
   1.2 Pest damage 2
   1.3 The major types of pests 3

C Tarsus (pl. tarsi)  The jointed 'foot' that bears the claws of an insect.
    Tergum (pl. terga)  The dorsal body sclerite of an insect.
    Thorax  That portion of an insect's body which lies between the head and
            abdomen and bears the legs and wings.

D Over the past 50 years a major portion of the world’s population has
    been undernourished or starving. The World Bank has estimated that
    65% of the people in developing countries receive at least 15% fewer
    calories than needed to function efficiently. This deficiency amounts

E First published 1985

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Associated companies and representatives in Accra,
Auckland, Delhi, Dublin, Gaborone, Hamburg, Harare,
Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Lagos, Manzini, Melbourne,
Mexico City, Nairobi, New York, Singapore, Tokyo


F An Introduction to
Insect Pests
and their Control

Peter D. Stiling

G 'I would certainly recommend the book for the courses for
which it is written, as well as for higher courses as an
introductory text.'
Dr. T.H. Coaker, Department of Applied Biology, University of
Cambridge.

*Introduction to Insect Pests and their Control* is written for
certificate, diploma and degree courses in agriculture, applied
biology and zoology. It will also find a place in 'A' level biology
and agriculture courses, and as a supplement to medical
entomology courses.

Unit 1  Getting to know your textbook

Task 3 (Individual)
Why do you think you should read these parts of a textbook? Note your reasons for reading each part.

1. cover or dust jacket
2. title page
3. publishing details
4. foreword, preface or introduction
5. table of contents
6. index
7. bibliography

Task 4 (Individual, then groups)
Study this passage to find the reasons given for reading each of the textbook parts listed in Task 3.
Discuss with the others in your group any differences between your answers to Task 3 and the reasons given in the passage.

Before accepting information published in a book, you should spend a few minutes examining its structure, for this will assist you in evaluating the book. The dust-jacket often contains information on the qualifications of the author and his point-of-view. Allowance must, of course, be made for the natural desire of the publisher and author to present the book in its best light. The title page should always be read carefully. It may contain a sub-title explaining the intention or scope of the work, or the qualifications of the author. The imprint (place of publication, publisher and date) is of value. The work is likely to be authoritative if published by a publisher who specializes in the subject of the book. The date will indicate how up-to-date the book is and the reverse of the title page should also be examined, in case this reveals whether the edition is substantially a reprint of an older work. The foreword, preface or introduction will often summarize the purpose of the volume (see Fig. 53). The table of contents will not only outline the way the work is arranged and help you to trace a particular piece of information (see Fig. 28) if the index is defective, but will also suggest the point-of-view. Every book is based on a combination of objective facts and subjective interpretation of them. The contents will suggest whether the author has set out to prove a theory or to spread a particular belief. The book may be of great value even if it contains propaganda, but greater care must be taken in evaluating the information. The running headlines on the top of the pages may contain useful information on the text. The index can reveal the scope of the book by listing the topics discussed (see Fig. 54) and the number of pages devoted to them. It can also reveal bias by the number of references under particular topics. The bibliography will reveal the author’s sources and will indicate whether he is up-to-date and thorough in his approach.

READING AND INTERACTION

Surveying a textbook

'Surveying' means reading for the general idea. When you buy or borrow a textbook required for your course, it is useful to survey it to find out as quickly as you can how it is organised, the topics it covers, its level and any special features it has. It is also worth checking that the book is up-to-date by noting the date of publication and the edition. Check if there is a more up-to-date edition available before you borrow it. Noting the title, author and publication details is also worth doing, so that you can refer to the book in your written work and locate it easily in the library if you wish to borrow it again.

Task 5 (Individual, then groups)

This form can be used to make a quick survey of a textbook. Which of the parts you looked at in Task 1 would help you most to complete each section?

Discuss your ideas in your group.

| 1. Title | |
| 2. Author(s) or editor(s) | |
| 3. Publisher, date and place of publication | |
| 4. Edition | |
| 5. Level | |
| 6. Aims | |
| 7. Main topics covered | |
| 8. Special features | |

Task 6 (Individual)

Look through a textbook, preferably in your own subject, but which is unfamiliar to you. Try to survey the book in about 15 minutes. Use this book if you cannot get a textbook in your own subject.

Scanning

The index of your textbook is a useful key to information. 'Scanning' is one of the reading skills you require to locate information quickly in the index. 'Scanning' means reading to find specific information. You have a specific target and you search the text for the words which match the information you need.

Given enough time, anyone can find information in an index. The important thing is to find the information you want as quickly as possible. To do this, you should let your eye go up and down the index columns until
you find the references beginning with the correct letters. Then focus more finely to search for the specific references you want. With practice, you can become faster at scanning by narrowing the area you scan – moving from coarse to fine focus – as quickly as possible.

**Task 7 (Individual, then pairs)**

Scan the index on page 11 to find information on the following. Write only the page number. Where more than one page number is given in the index, indicate the page or pages you would refer to first. **Bold** type in this index indicates an illustration. Work as quickly as you can.

Warning! You will not be able to find a reference to one of these topics.

1. Sir Isaac Newton’s *Principia*
2. John von Neumann’s book on computers
3. Sir Charles Lyell’s *The Principles of Geology*
4. The French Revolution (1789)
5. Ernest Rutherford’s appearance
6. The life of Paracelsus
7. The oxygenation of blood
8. The theorem of Pythagoras
9. The Natural History Society, Brno
10. The architecture of Ancient Rome

When you have found your answers, compare with another student.

Sometimes we cannot find the information we want in an index, although the book may contain all the information we need. If you cannot find your topic, make sure first that you are using the correct key word. The most likely key words in these examples are in **bold** type:

The discovery of oxygen
Sir Isaac Newton’s interest in the occult

Often more than one key word is possible. For example, ‘The architecture of Ancient Rome’ may be listed in an index as:

**Rome**, Ancient, architecture of

or

**Architecture**, of Ancient Rome

If you cannot find a very specific reference, try a more general key word. For example, to find The French Revolution of 1789 you may have to try any of the terms in **bold** type:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revolutions</th>
<th>Revolutions, political</th>
<th>Revolutions, social</th>
<th>Revolutions, industrial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revolutions, 18th century</td>
<td>Revolutions, 19th century</td>
<td>Revolutions, 20th century</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**French Revolution (1789)**
Unit 1  Getting to know your textbook

Task 8 (Individual)

Match each of the topics (1–10) from a geography textbook with a more general key word (a–j) from the index.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Index key word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. air routes</td>
<td>a) ores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. cultivation of oranges</td>
<td>b) urbanisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. troposphere</td>
<td>c) sea routes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. cotton growing</td>
<td>d) mining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. underpopulation</td>
<td>e) transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Panama Canal</td>
<td>f) climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. growth of New York</td>
<td>g) atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. uranium</td>
<td>h) population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. coal production</td>
<td>i) industrial crops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. rainfall</td>
<td>j) citrus farming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TEXT EXPLORATION

Discourse study: Textbook structure

A typical textbook has this structure:

- Introduction
- Contents
- Chapters
  1.
  2.
  3.
  etc.
- Further reading
- Appendices
- Index

The best guide to the organisation of the textbook and the topics it covers is provided by the introduction and the contents. Pay particular attention to any section of the introduction labelled ‘Advice to the reader’, ‘To the student’, ‘How to use this book’, etc. You can safely ignore the acknowledgements.

Word study: Words which substitute for other words

In this section we will explore some of the features of written English which can cause problems for readers. Words are one of the first problems that
Text exploration

readers face – words which are unfamiliar, words which substitute for other words, and words which appear to be missing. Here we will study ways of dealing with words which substitute for other words.

Writers often use different words in a text to refer to the same thing – the meaning remains the same but the words change. Study these examples:

1. Before accepting information published in a book, you should spend a few minutes examining its structure. The work is likely to be authoritative if published by a publisher who specializes in the subject of the book. The foreword, preface or introduction will often summarize the purpose of the volume.

Work and volume do not signal new topics. They are simply different words for book in this text. If you meet an unexpected change of topic in your reading, look back in the text. The writer may be using a new word for an old topic.

2. The index can reveal the scope of the book by listing the topics discussed and the number of pages devoted to them. It can also reveal bias by the number of references under particular topics.

Nouns change to pronouns, as in this example. If you have difficulty with a pronoun, look back in the text to find the noun referred to.

Grammar and meaning: Ellipsis

Words which appear to be missing may also cause problems. Some structures allow writers to omit words to avoid unnecessary repetition. Study these examples:

1. It is important that you have a clear purpose when you read. If not, you may waste valuable study time.

2. It is important that you have a clear purpose when you read. If you do not have a clear purpose, you may waste valuable study time.

Compare:

3. Dictionaries and encyclopaedias are important information sources. Both can be found in the reference section of your library.

4. Dictionaries and encyclopaedias are important information sources. Both dictionaries and encyclopaedias can be found in the reference section of your library.

Compare:

5. In addition to card catalogues, most libraries have on-line catalogues. Online are more flexible than printed.

6. In addition to card catalogues, most libraries have on-line catalogues. On-line catalogues are more flexible than printed catalogues.
Unit 1  Getting to know your textbook

Task 9 (Individual)

Study this preface from a reference book. Answer the questions in italics about words which substitute for other words or appear to be missing.

This book has been prepared to provide a guide to sources of information on engineering and its various branches. It *What does it refer to?* should prove of interest to all persons engaged in the engineering profession and those *Add the missing word* contemplating entering the *Add the missing word* profession. It is hoped that Chapters 1 and 8, on careers, and education and training, will assist both advisers and potential students seeking information about these important matters. *Which important matters?* This book has been arranged according to the Dewey Decimal Classification that is commonly employed in public libraries. Although the work *Which work?* is reasonably comprehensive, there are so many textbooks available that it has not been possible to make specific recommendations. *Of what? Add the missing words.* This matter *Which matter?* is better dealt with by tutors and others concerned with teaching. However, in certain chapters, selected books have been mentioned in addition to reference books and the like *The like of what?* when it has been felt that the details *Details of what?* would augment the general information provided. *Information provided where?* A number of the books referred to contain neither bibliographies nor guides to further reading.


APPLICATION

Task 10 (Individual)

Study this extract from a study skills guide. Which chapters in the guide will provide help with these problems?

1. planning essays
2. acquiring basic study skills
3. setting out references
4. finding suitable books
5. preparing for examinations
6. looking for a job

How to Read this Book

There are seven chapters in the book, arranged in a sequence which roughly mirrors a student’s progress through college. The first chapter deals with ‘Starting off in higher education’ and is intended mainly for people who are just about to go to university/college or who are in their first year there. If you are an experienced student, you may still find it useful to read this chapter fairly quickly.
The next three chapters tackle different aspects of normal coursework. Chapter 2 deals with 'Generating information', finding literature, using it effectively, and making notes. Chapter 3 describes 'Analysing concepts and theories', particularly explaining how to place problem concepts within a whole field of ideas. Once you have gathered enough information and you understand the major concepts involved in an area, Chapter 4 moves on to 'Writing essays'. It describes how to de-bug essay topics, plan your response, and write up finished text.

The next two chapters relate to course assessment. You may move on in your final year to 'Writing dissertations', the subject of Chapter 5. Dissertations pose some problems over and above ordinary essay writing, especially in organizing research, writing up a longer piece of text and referencing sources. Chapter 6 deals with the final and most critical stage in most courses, 'Revising for exams' and answering exam questions.

Chapter 7 on 'Turning study skills into life skills' is likely to be of immediate relevance if you are beginning the 'milk round' of career interviews and job applications. However, it is worth reading well in advance of this stage, since by then it is generally rather late to do anything about acquiring career-relevant skills. The earlier you think through some ideas about possible career lines, the greater the opportunity you have to undertake relevant activities and develop key personal qualities.