

# TEACHER to TEACHER

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## “\$\$\$” In the Bank: An Active Reading Strategy for the Content-Area Classroom

by

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Many students are blocked from achieving classroom success by one simple challenge: reading the textbook. What if every student in your class read and understood the text material prior to coming to class or even in preparation for a test? This may be an unachievable goal, but what if you could influence just a handful of students in each class to make this change? For those students the effects could be transformative and long lasting.

The technique described below can have that transformative effect and it will only require that you spend approximately 30 minutes of class during the first week of the semester. If you are truly serious about having your students read their textbook, then why not spend this minimal amount of time facilitating that process?

As an introduction to presenting the system, you might want to let your students know, “This strategy that I am presenting to our class today could eventually lead to “\$\$\$” in the bank!” This means that, for every hour a student spends in the classroom and in study time at home, the mere application and mastery of the technique proposed here will bring students one step closer to actually “banking” that money. This is true because of the increases in G.P.A. that they will experience and the increased power over textual material that they will take into the world of work. Students are actually “putting it away” for the day when they step into the career of their choosing—this will likely be evident in the higher salary that they will be earning once they get started in their career.

*“Instead of just reading chapters or handouts listed as due in their syllabus, students are now actively engaged doing work in their textbook and on handouts.”*

While there are a variety of “tools” that students can implement to make their academic experience a more pleasant and successful one, there is one technique that probably rises to the level of a “must-have” strategy: the “**HQA3R**” Comprehension System.

We can almost predict that “far-away” and confused look in many students’ eyes when we ask them, “What was the chapter about?” Students may also refuse to make eye-contact with their instructor for fear of being called upon to discuss the reading. Hopefully, with “**HQA3R**,” those days are long gone! If the system is applied properly (without students taking shortcuts), then those very students will actually be covering the “necessary” material (that is, the material covered in exams) at least ten times over.

“**HQA3R**” is one of the most valuable tools a student will ever implement from the onset of the semester. Instructors can introduce it and explain it during the first week of classes in their respective discipline (content area). When students apply “**HQA3R**” to a textbook or handout, they actually “get into” the material instead of just reading it. It is based on the theory of Active Reading—students actually “do” much with the material before they even read the entire chapter or handout. The technique is easier than it looks at first glance!

## “**HQA3R**”

Super Study II: A College Learning Strategies Guidebook,  
J. A. Garcia, McGraw-Hill Custom Publishing Co., 1996.

**H** = HIGHLIGHT – Students “Skim/Scan”



through the entire chapter/handout. They do not read everything—that will come later! They **highlight in YELLOW** all the Titles and Subtitles in the chapter. Also, they should highlight in yellow any words in bold print and/or italics, along with the definitions of those terms.

**Q** = **QUESTIONS** – Now the student goes back to the beginning of the chapter and begins to label each “highlighted” title, subtitle, or bold/italicized word as follows: Q1, Q2, Q3, etc...These will serve as possible test **QUESTIONS** that the student could expect to see on a quiz or exam.

**EXAMPLE** – A psychology text chapter subtitle might look like the following:

Abraham Maslow – The Hierarchy of Needs

The **HIGHLIGHTED** portion with appropriate **LABELING** is as follows:

Q1 – Abraham Maslow  
Q2 – the Hierarchy of Needs

As each ‘Question’ is labeled (Q1, Q2, Q3....), the student should create and write out that “possible” test question on a separate sheet, preferably in a notebook that the student will use for this class only (see example below). After each question in the notebook is labeled and written out (Q1, Q2), the student should skip approximately 5 to 6 lines to leave room for the answers that will be coming in the next step.

The “**QUESTIONS**” derived from the **HIGHLIGHTING** could include the following:

Q1: Who is Abraham Maslow and why is he important? (Leave 5-6 lines for answers)  
Q2: What is Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs? Explain

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each clearly. (Leave space for answers)

It is essential to note that students **SHOULD NOT** take a short cut at this time by writing the answer out at the time the question was created. Answers should not be written in the notebook until **ALL** questions have been written out from **ALL** of the highlighted material. Taking a shortcut will only decrease the student's retention level, as well as lower the overall comprehension level that the system is intended to build. This notebook will serve as the student's study guide for the course, and this can easily be indicated at the top of the first page:

## Study Guide—Psych 101: Chapter 1

**A = ANSWERS** – the student reads **ONLY** to find the answers to each “possible” test question. After finding each answer, the student underlines it immediately in **BLACK** Fine Point Marker Pen and then labels it—A1, A2, A3..... After each answer is labeled, the student writes the answer in the space reserved earlier for each of the questions in the Study Guide. Students should write as much of the answer in their own words. They will do this for each question until all questions have been answered. These are the same questions that were marked with yellow highlighter during the “Skim/Scan” portion of the system and the same ones that were labeled during the “Question” portion of the system.

**(Students now have a BASIC SET of questions and answers from the chapter in the text!)**

**R = Students RECITE** aloud each “Question” and it’s “Answer”—and they do this in a quiet setting. This is to prevent that “little voice” from intruding

on and disrupting the study session—the “inner voice” that keeps interrupting: “PSST, go get us a soda—don’t forget the Cheetos, too! Are we done yet? Hurry, let’s go play—it’s Friday!” During this step, students can go over their initial set of “Q & A” as many times as needed for complete understanding.

It is okay for students to go over them just a couple of times to see what they actually **DO** know and what may require further review. Students can check off what they know (what they can answer easily) and mark what they will need to go over several more times.

**R = READ** – Finally, during this step, students will now actually **READ** the entire chapter for the

**FIRST** and **ONLY** time. Students are **NOT** reading the chapter now because it was assigned or because it was “due.” They are reading it for one reason **ONLY**—they want to make sure that they have not missed any other important information that might be on an exam—other relevant Q’s and A’s. During this step, students should do all of the previous steps—the same steps that they completed at the beginning of the system. Those steps are listed below:

1. Highlight (Yellow) any new possible test questions.
2. Label the questions (Q15, Q16, etc.).
3. Find and Underline the answer (Black).
4. Label the answers (A15, A16, etc.).

These are “new” possible test questions/answers that may have been missed during the initial “H” (Skim & Scan) and “Q” (Question) and “A” (Answer) stages above.

**(Students now have a COMPLETE set of Q’s and A’s to study for exams!)**



“\$\$\$” In The Bank continued

**R** = Students **REVIEW** all Questions and Answers for tests/quizzes! They **DO NOT** have to use the text again. It is not necessary to re-read the chapter or handout information again—students actually have what they need for tests! By this time, students do not realize that they have covered much of the relevant material quite a number of times. It is the learning through repetition (versus memorization) that will build retention and comprehension. Now, all they need to do is to **REVIEW**—go over all questions and answers, as many times as necessary (or until there is a “comfort level” with the material). This is the final step in a student’s preparation for exams and quizzes!

Instead of just “reading” chapters or handouts listed as “due” in their syllabus, students are now “actively engaged” doing work in their textbook and on handouts. Students actually no longer fear taking quizzes; they also do not panic with the mere mention of exams. They participate more in classroom discussions based on their out-of-class readings, as a result of increased confidence and self-esteem. All this is the result of slight changes to their reading and study habits! Furthermore, the information provided by the system almost always matches what will be on the exam for that particular chapter—students are always amazed that they were able to “create” the test long before the professor even thought about doing so for that chapter or handout. This goes back to the theory of Active Reading—it requires students to do much more than just read a chapter or a handout. It requires them to actively involve themselves in the material—we want them to “DO.” And reading alone is **NOT DOING!** We want students to become “involved” with the material or information that they are attempting to learn and retain—then, at least we are giving students techniques that will begin building their retention and comprehension

levels. If we can do that, more successes quickly follow!

Active Reading is a definite advantage for every student taking content area college courses and can be the overwhelming factor in their college success. The reason for this is that a large percentage of students are entering college functioning below college level in both reading and vocabulary comprehension. It is hard to believe that a great many do not have any of the basic skills necessary for success, much less for completing an entire college-level course. But active reading is not just for the low-skill students and is not a practice that only those with deficiencies can add to their daily repertoire of study/learning strategies. Active Reading practices can also assist students by introducing them to practical methods for applying contemporary learning strategies that they may not be aware exist. Many learning strategies are designed to make studying much easier and test taking less stressful. Many times, these same strategies are geared for a particular course in the content area. In other words, when students are **successful**, it’s just like “\$\$\$” in the bank!

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