Reading your history Textbook: A 3-Step Process

We all have different strategies for reading, taking notes, and studying for tests. This guide outlines one basic approach, but you will modify these steps to suit your learning style and your teacher’s expectations.

STEP 1: BEFORE READING

- **Organize your materials.** In addition to your textbook, have your teacher’s terms list, highlighter, pen, notebook & printed copy of the chapter outline in front of you.

- **Scan the section headings** of your assigned reading. Turn each heading into a question to answer, or try to guess what the main idea of each section will be. **Count how many sections** you will need to read.

STEP 2: WHILE READING

- Actively read the first section by **underlining and highlighting the main idea(s) of each paragraph** (not necessarily the first sentence).

- Once you have finished reading one section, **scan your terms list** to find the important people, places, or events within that section. **Box those terms** in your textbook or use a different color highlighter for the term and definition.

- In your notebook, **write the section heading in bold letters** at the top of your page. Take **short notes (no full sentences)**, using abbreviations and symbols (❤ ↓ $ *) whenever possible.
  - Take quizzable notes (see example) so that you can easily identify key terms and self-test.
  - Make sure your notes are grouped into smaller “chunks,” whether it is by section, person, or event. Pay close attention not only to the context and meaning of each term, but also how each term relates to one another.
  - Consider the 5Ws - **WHO** is this person? **WHAT** did he do? **WHEN & WHERE** did it happen? **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT** to the historical storyline?
  - Leave enough white space on the page so that you can annotate your notes during class discussion.
  - Leave a blank space at the bottom of the page for a summary of that section (See our handout on Cornell notes).
  - If you are having trouble figuring out what is important, scan the chapter outline and model it, without copying word-for-word.

STEP 3: AFTER READING

- Once you have finished all sections in your reading assignment, **test yourself by writing a short summary** of each section at the bottom of the page, or quizzing aloud with a friend.

- **Quiz yourself on all key terms** in each section. Do not re-read as a study method!

- Read the “**Before/After Your Read This Chapter**” boxes at the beginning and end of the chapter to see if you can answer the questions. List any questions you have for your teacher.

Now you are ready for the next quiz and class discussion!