



## How to Read a Textbook Page

### Unit 2: Developing Students' Textual Intelligence

**Sidebars**  
They offer information that complements but is not always essential to the main text.

**Chapter/Section Heading**  
Teach students to use all headings and subheadings to orient themselves. Before reading, have them write down questions or predictions about the subject based on title/headings.

**Header**  
Used to orient readers to the chapter and section. Many books divide chapters into "sections" or "units."

**Icons/Symbols**  
Textbooks use them throughout a book in a standardized way. When you see one ask, "What does that refer to?" They refer to activities, connections, cross-curricular links, or, in some cases, multimedia tools.

**Pre-reading**  
Have students can the following to before they read:  
• Objective  
• Headers  
• Subheaders  
• Section questions  
• Terms to know  
• Identified themes

**OBJECTIVE**  
To show students how a page and its elements work so they can read it more successfully.

Listed at the beginning of most chapters you will usually find:  
• Terms to know  
• Themes  
• Objectives  
• Connections (to Internet, other chapters and subject areas)

**DAILY STRATEGY: ASK QUESTIONS**  
Ask these questions when trying to make sense of typography:  
1. What is the author/publisher doing with typography here?  
2. How are they using it (e.g., italics) in this context?  
3. Why did they choose to use this typographical effect here?

**Pull Boxes**  
Similar to sidebars in effect, these usually feature the following content:  
• connections  
• features  
• strategies  
• profiles

Most textbooks use italics and bold typeface to indicate new terms and those listed in the glossary. Always ask, "How is the writer using italics in this instance?" (To indicate a new term? A book's title? To emphasize an idea?)

Typography comes in different forms:  
• **bold**  
• *italic*  
• roman (normal)  
• underlined  
• color  
• icon/symbol

**Subheader: More on Typography**  
Subheaders indicate a subsection of the chapter's larger ideas. If a chapter is titled "Major Scientific Discoveries," a subheading like "Einstein's General Theory of Relativity" might signal a specific emphasis on that discovery. Subheaders might appear in boxes, **bold**, *italics*, or a larger font than the text that follows. In short, typography is used to:

- Emphasize
- Communicate (e.g., that an italicized word's definition can be found in the book's glossary (which will appear at the book's end or in a *sidebar* or *pull out* on that same page.
- Organize
- Designate (e.g., certain space for a specific purpose; specific typeface as part of a given group; certain colors for certain themes, units, or connections).

### Subheader: Organization of Information and Paragraphs

Textbooks typically put the main idea of the paragraph in the first sentence. One advantage to this structure is that reader's can skim and scan their way through the chapter prior to reading it or taking a test on it. Another benefit to this structure is that readers should know where to look to find the main ideas when reading. A final advantage to this feature is that it helps students understand how the text works by using predictable, familiar conventions to support the reader's need for help.

Textbooks these days use lists for many different purposes. In addition to making for a more concise text, lists allow you to emphasize the sequential nature of some information or the equivalent nature of other information. To communicate such information through lists, writers and publishers use the following types of lists:

- **bullets**, which incorporate various "dingbats" but do not distinguish or otherwise rank the contents of the list
- **numbers**, which emphasize the sequential nature of information
- **check-boxes**, which imply a sequence in many cases without the use of numbers

**Textual Organization**  
Textbooks organize information into lists and paragraphs. Here the boxed words indicate the different examples of the paragraph's main idea. Words like *first*, *another*, or *finally* indicate that info is sequentially arranged.

**Conventions**  
Explain what such abbreviations mean.

**Find the Main Idea**  
Look to the first and last sentences to find the main idea of each paragraph. See also the headers and subheaders.

**Vocabulary**  
Determine which words students must know in order to read the assignment successfully.

- Terms to Know**
- icon
  - abbreviation
  - acronym
  - symbol
  - annotate
  - margin
  - objective

**Lists**  
Determine whether the contents of a list are equivalent or arranged from most to least important. Note also the use of bold typeface to identify the three main types of lists.



### ACTIVITY: SURVEY SAYS...

**Directions:** Ask five adults (adult = 18 or older) to list the most common types of reading they do in the course of a day. At least two people should be thirty or older, and the five people cannot all do the same type of work. Create a three column spreadsheet. List the different types things (e.g., newspaper, contracts, etc.) that they read in column one. In column two, write a concise description of why they read that (e.g., for work). In the third column identify the skills they use to read these different types of documents. Finally, ask them to identify the five types of reading they do the most. Put a star next to each of these five documents in column one.

### FUN FACTS!

**45,000 - 3,000 years ago**

- Alphabet invented
- Extremely easy to use
- Near universal literacy possible.
- Semites - Canaanites, Phoenicians, and Israelites - become first peoples to become substantially literate.
- First alphabetic book: the Hebrew bible.
- Images of any kind proscribed in first culture to worship written words.

SOURCE: Leonard Shlain, from *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess*

**Supplemental Info**  
Most textbooks now include such regular features as "career connections," "technology links," or profiles of important people. Students need to learn when and why to read such content. They also need to realize the info's brevity means it is incomplete.

**Color Codes**  
Textbooks frequently color code the book to help readers find their way around. Thus all "Fun Facts" would use the same color format.

**Reading Directions**  
Have students try any or all of the following strategies to understand directions:  
• Underline all verbs (e.g., draw, list, find) to clarify what they are supposed to do.  
• Identify the expected outcome (e.g., write an essay, take a test).  
• Rewrite as a checklist to clarify what to do and the order in which to do it.  
• After identifying the verb, ask "What am I supposed to do, e.g., draw?"



### Check for Understanding: Section Review

1. List three questions that will help you read this page better.
2. List three different ways typography is used to communicate information and meaning to a reader.
3. What do you call information that appears in the margins?
4. What do you call the boxes (e.g., Fun Facts)? Explain why writers use these boxes and how you should read them.
5. What are two strategies to help you understand directions.

**Reading Figures**  
When and why should readers look at the figures? Show students the point at which they are directed to go to the figure (5 = chapter 5; 12 = the twelfth figure in that chapter). Ask, "How does this information complement or relate to the text to which it is linked?" For example, does it complete, supplement, or rephrase the content of the main text?

Figure 5-12: Timeline of Literacy

### Internet Connection

For more information, visit:  
<http://www.alphabetvs goddess.com>

### Chapter Five: How to Read a Page

**Pre-Reading**  
Have students read the discussion questions before they start reading so they know what they need to understand and find. Note also the use of a standardized icon to indicate these questions which appear at each section's end.

**Footer**  
Many textbooks include different information in the footer. Pay attention to this and use such information to orient you to the main ideas and location within the chapter.

### A Short Note to the Teacher/User of this Page

I created this page after listening to my students make the following comments:  
• "I don't understand how to read the page. It has all these colors and boxes and symbols on it, and I don't know what they mean or what I'm supposed to do with them. I get totally confused."  
• "I don't understand what the directions say," or "I don't understand what the directions want me to do."  
A short list of the essential skills students need would include:  
• identify the main idea  
• distinguish between important and irrelevant information  
• know which questions to ask (and *when* and *how* to ask them)  
• determine if they understood the information and, if they did not, know which strategies to use to increase their comprehension

**Web links**  
More textbooks include links to web sites. Teach students how to read web sites. Also help them understand when, how, and why they should pursue the information provided on the web site.