

Reading Assignments from the Textbook

Purpose of the reading assignments

A textbook is an important part of any course. It can reinforce lecture material, as well as providing charts, diagrams, summaries, illustrations, and practice problems. It can also be a valuable resource for understanding difficult concepts. In addition, it helps to ensure that students at different colleges and universities learn the same basic material in a given course. Unfortunately, many students fail to take advantage of this resource, even though they have usually paid a lot of money for it.

Reasons why students fail to read the textbook, or don't get much from the experience, are cause for concern among the faculty of Dixie State College. Tests have shown that although most students improve in math and writing skills while here at the college, reading skills don't improve much. Reading is a critical skill in any work environment, especially the kind that college graduates are usually seeking. As a faculty we would like to help you improve your critical reading skills, and therefore you are likely to find reading requirements in many of your classes.

Organic chemistry doesn't allow time for me to teach reading comprehension during class, or to give quizzes or ask questions that specifically test whether or not you understand what you are reading in the textbook. In place of this, I have chosen to require you to summarize self-selected portions of each chapter. I hope that writing down a summary of what you read as you go will force you to process what you are reading and put the concepts into your own words. I will also ask you to write a short paragraph about your reading experience so that you can reflect analytically about it and put your thinking into words.

Each chapter will have a reading assignment. On the following pages you will find a list for each chapter of the sections of the book which contain topics we have discussed in that chapter. You may choose any combination of these sections such that you read a total of ten pages. If a section begins near the top or bottom of a page, round up, but if it uses less than half of a page, you must combine it with another. You may, of course, read more than 10 pages of the textbook, but you are only required to summarize and discuss 10. Remember, the goal of a mature student isn't to get away with as little work as possible, but to use the course requirements as an opportunity for learning.

If you have chosen not to purchase the textbook, you can obtain a copy of an older edition at the reserve desk in the library. You can only check it out for two hours at a time, and it may not leave the library. Please do NOT make any marks in these textbooks! If you have found that underlining, making notes in the margin, etc are helpful for you, please make copies and mark on them instead of in the original text. If you find the textbook useful enough to warrant purchasing your own copy, the bookstore can order you one, or you can buy one from one of the used textbook vendors on-line (often at a better price).

In addition to the textbook, there are some other books in the library which may be helpful to you – please see the list below. You may substitute 5 pages from the textbook for 5

pages from any of these books for any chapter. Some students have found these particularly helpful; however, you must use the table of contents or index to find appropriate pages. I encourage you to do this at least once or twice during the semester.

Your summaries and written paragraphs are due on the day of the group learning activity, which is the same day that the homework is due. Try not to leave this assignment until the last day, or you'll have more than you can do that night. Doing the reading as you go is more also likely to be helpful to your learning than cramming it all at the end.

Other resources:

Organic Chemistry Made Ridiculously Simple

Davis, Gene A.

Course Reserve, Chem 2310, 2320

Instant Notes: Organic Chemistry

Patrick, G.

QD 256.5 .P37 2004

Schaum's Outline of Theory and Problems of Organic Chemistry

Meislich, Nechamkin, Sharefkin, and Hademos

QD 257 .M44 1999

Organic Chemistry as a Second Language: Translating the Basic Concepts

Klein, David R.

QD 256 .K54 2004

Pushing Electrons: A Guide for Students of Organic Chemistry

Weeks, Daniel P.

QD 476 .W38 1998

(Useful for chapter 7 and onwards)

Some tips for successful reading

- Review the lecture notes for the section that you are going to read. Having the concepts fresh in your mind will make understanding the reading much easier.
- It takes patience to do this kind of reading. Expect to read each section more than once. Try to figure out what each sentence is saying before going on to the next. Once you've gone through each paragraph, reread it and see if you can put it all together. At the end of each section, stop and say to yourself, now, what did I just read? Write your notes as you go, and make sure to use your own words, not the exact words of the text! If you can't explain it to yourself, you don't understand it yet – go back and work on it some more.
- Notice of the structure of the text. The headings and paragraphs can help you break it up into manageable chunks and let you know what the main idea will be. Look for the main idea and supporting ideas in each paragraph. Look for words in bold print, notes at the side, and summaries which can help make sense of the text.
- If you come across words you don't know, look them up. If they are organic chemistry words, try the glossary at the back of the textbook. If they are regular English words, use a dictionary. Don't waste time guessing what something means when you could just look it up.
- Find a secluded spot and read out loud – this can help keep your mind focused, and brings the part of your brain in charge of interpreting speech into the effort. Try reading into a tape recorder and listening to the tape. You may also read the chapter out loud with another student and discuss what it means together. (If you do this, however, you must each write your own notes and analysis separately.)
- Pay attention to your environment. Is there too much noise or too many distractions? Is it too quiet? Are you sitting comfortably? Is it a good time of day for reading? Trying to read with the TV on, roommates joking around, babies crying, in dead quiet, in an uncomfortable position, or in the middle of the night can all hinder your efforts.
- Take breaks. According to Dr. Walker, your brain can only focus well on something for about 20 minutes. After that, it becomes difficult to concentrate and be productive. So don't try to read for more than 20 minutes without a break. Get up and walk around, get a drink, take out the garbage, do some dishes, play with your kids, run around the building, whatever. Just don't let your breaks take over your study sessions!
- If you are having a hard time concentrating because you keep thinking about other things, take out a sheet of paper and free write for 5 or 10 minutes about whatever you are thinking about. This can have the effect of emptying your brain onto the page, and helps get worries or basketball games or whatever off your mind so that you can concentrate. If you are worried about what you need to get done, make a list of everything you need to do and prioritize it. Having a plan can help you focus on one thing at a time.

Instructions for completing the reading assignments

1. Decide which sections you are going to read so that they add up to a total of 10 pages. At the top of a piece of notebook paper, write the sections and the page numbers that they correspond to.
2. Read the assigned section and write a summary of what you're reading on your notebook paper. This should be a summary of what the author is saying in your own words. Look carefully at any charts or figures, or mechanisms to see what they can add to your understanding. Do a few of the practice problems to make sure you understand them.
3. Write a short, typed paragraph for each chapter (1/3 to 1/4 page single-spaced), discussing your reading experience, using the questions below as a guideline. You don't have to answer all of them – just use them to get ideas of what you could say. You may also comment on other sections if you chose to read any. Do NOT simply give your summaries again.
 - Does the book cover the same things as the class notes? What extra information was there? Was it helpful, or did it seem unnecessary? Did the book skip over anything that was in the notes?
 - What more did you learn, or in what ways did this material make sense that you hadn't put together before?
 - Are the ideas in a different order in the notes and the text? Explain any differences. Which order made more sense to you, and why?
 - Were the mechanisms, charts, figures, or other graphics helpful? What did you learn from them?
 - What was your biggest difficulty in understanding the text? In what ways are your reading skills good, and in what ways could you improve?

On the day the reading is due, turn in a typed paragraph stapled to your handwritten summaries. Make sure to put your name at the top. Each chapter is worth 10 points, and all together these assignments will constitute 5% of your grade.