

Previewing a Reading Passage

The first step in effectively reading any piece of material is previewing. Previewing simply means looking over your reading material in order to become familiar with its content before you actually begin reading it. In this way, you begin thinking about any experiences you may have had with the subject.

Many students jump into a reading assignment by just beginning with the first word and reading on from there. This is not an efficient reading technique because it does not give you any real idea of what the material is about or where the author is taking you.

Previewing, on the other hand, gives you the “big picture” of what is in store for you. Previewing gets you thinking about the material and your own experiences with it. Previewing helps you to better understand the information you are about to read and helps you get interested in the reading.

Here are four steps to follow when previewing a reading passage.

1. Read the Title. The title often will give you the topic or subject of the reading passage. As you read the title, begin thinking about the reading passage. “What is the passage about?” “What kind of information will I learn?” “What do I already know about this subject?”
2. Read the First Paragraph. The first paragraph often will give you the main idea of the reading selection. As you read the first paragraph, continue thinking about the material. “Does the first paragraph give me any more specific information about the reading?” “What do I know about this subject?” If the selection is very short, such as a single paragraph, you need to read just the first one or two sentences.
3. Read the Last Paragraph. The last paragraph often sums up what the author has to say. You get an idea as to what the author feels is most important. Again if the selection is very short, you need to read only the last one or two sentences.
4. Look Over the Passage. Move your eyes quickly over the passage. As you glance over the material, note any key words that might give you additional information about the main idea.