

HOW TO READ A MATH TEXTBOOK

Since a math text is written in English, you may think you can read it just like you read a novel. This is DEFINITELY not so. You may be able to read a novel in a few hours but in math just reading a paragraph might take just as long!

Here are some tips on reading math textbooks.

1. **EVERY word is important.** Don't let a single phrase or even word get by you. You need to know exactly what is being said and what it means. Make sketches or examples as you read. Well known mathematicians wrote in the margins and you should do the same.

If something doesn't make sense no matter what you seem to do, mark it so that you can ask a classmate, a tutor, or your instructor.

2. **Work through the examples given in the book.** This doesn't mean to just read along, but rather that you should cover up the steps and answer and try doing the problem in the margin or on another sheet of paper. Reading a math book is a paper and pencil deal. This is NOT a passive subject. After working it, compare answers and then compare the steps. If your steps are a little different than the way they are in the book, do not get frustrated or confused. You might be doing the problem correctly if you follow the mathematical rules correctly. If you think you are doing it right but just differently, ask a tutor or your instructor to check it for you.

3. **Get comfortable with the definitions.** When you come across a definition and after you've seen some examples, rewrite the definition in your own words and create some of your own examples. If you aren't sure that you have them right, please ask a tutor or your instructor.

4. **Reread, reread, and reread again if you need to.** It is estimated that for each hour spent in class you might need 3 hours of work on it to really understand it. For some this time is more and for others less: take as much as you need. There are NO shortcuts!

5. **Do the exercises at the end of the section.** Do those that have answers so that you can check if you are doing them correctly. Don't panic if you get one wrong. Go back and reread and rework examples. Try the exercises again. If you keep getting exercises consistently wrong, don't get frustrated and go crazy. Get help.

You are not alone in this process. Either call a fellow student and get into groups, ask your instructor for help, or go to a tutor. The tutoring schedule is on the syllabus.