



Santa Ana College Reading Department Survey of the Use of Textbooks at Santa Ana College, Fall 2005

Compiled by the RSCCD Research Department, December 2005

Background

In an ongoing effort to assess the reading needs of our students and, specifically, the effect of reading proficiency on overall course success, the SAC Reading Department administered a brief survey to students across a wide variety of disciplines. The questionnaire asked students to identify the role of textbooks in their coursework, as well as in their personal study routines. 1189 completed questionnaires were returned; those data are included in this report.

Summary of Findings

- 19% of the respondents are first-time freshmen at SAC. A third (33%) have completed only 1-2 semesters. The average number of semesters completed by respondents is 3.
- Respondents reported a wide variety of majors but, generally, there were no significant differences in responses between major groups.
- Most respondents consider the textbook a supplement to classroom instruction (72%).
- Nearly half of respondents (47%) reported that they read the textbook only when the instructor emphasizes the importance of certain assignments.
- Over half of respondents (53%) reported that they complete most of their textbook assignments.
- 71% of respondents reported “lack of time” as the reason for not completing textbook assignments; about 20% reported that they “don’t understand the assignment.”
- 17% reported that they believe they can succeed in most of their classes without having completed the textbook assignments. 78% of respondents reported that they are likely to only complete about half of the textbook assignments.

Detail of Findings

Most of the respondents (72%) reported that they view the textbook as a supplement to class instruction, and most (81%) read the textbook at least when their instructor emphasizes the importance of a particular assignment.

Role of the Textbook in Classes			
Supplement class instruction	Large portion of grade	Both	Total Respondents
72%	25%	2%	1160

Role of Textbook in Personal Study Routine				
Don't buy	Buy it but don't read it	Read only when teacher emphasizes	Always read assignments	Total Respondents
3%	16%	47%	34%	1182

Nearly a quarter (22%) of the respondents, however, reported that they are likely to complete fewer than half of the textbook assignments given by their instructors.

Number of Assignments Likely to Complete (of 10)				
0-3	4-5	6-7	8-10	Total Respondents
8%	14%	24%	53%	1170

The most often cited reason for not completing textbook assignments was time constraints (nearly three-quarters of the respondents). 8% reported that they find the textbook too difficult to understand.

	Number Who Agree	Percent Who Agree
Don't have enough time to complete textbook assignments	776	71%
Don't think they're important	87	8%
Don't understand the assignment	212	20%
Too difficult to understand the textbook	91	8%

Just under half of the respondents (49%) recognized a particular strategy used when they read their textbooks. Among the most cited strategies were:

- Making notes, either in margins or on separate page, outlining major ideas, or highlighting information they consider important.
- Reading the text, paying special attention to major section titles, bolded/highlighted text and vocabulary, and completing tests and/or answering questions at the end of the chapters, and
- Reading the textbook multiple times, sometimes orally.

Overall, just over half of the respondents (51%) reported to have dropped a class at SAC. The reasons most cited for having dropped a class were as follows:

- Respondents had unrealistic expectations about the number of units they could handle and needed to drop a class in order to devote adequate time to the others.
- Many felt that they were not performing well enough in the class to succeed and preferred to receive a “W” grade.

	Percent Who Agree	Total Respondents
Use Strategy While Reading Textbook	49%	1161
Have Dropped a Class	51%	1174

17% of respondents reported that they could succeed in most of their classes without completing any textbook assignments. Nearly half of respondents (41%) believed that they could succeed in half of their classes without reading the textbook. This finding is supported by the most often cited general comments about textbooks:

- Textbooks are too expensive.
- Textbooks are too expensive and many instructors rarely make assignments in them—it’s a waste of our money.

Percent Who Believe that they Can Succeed in their Classes Without Completing Textbook Assignments (of 10 classes)				
Succeed in 0-3 classes	Succeed in 4-5 classes	Succeed in 6-7 classes	Succeed in 8-10 classes	Total Respondents
35%	25%	24%	17%	1148

Detailed student comments are included in the following section of this report.

Student Comments

Question #6: Explain why the textbook is too difficult.

- The examples on the textbooks could be more clear and organized or detailed better. The people who write these books think nothing of how the average Joe interprets what they have to say. We need our books to be more like a “Dummies Guide”. (24)
- I always complete the assignments, even if I have to borrow the book (22)
- I have more important stuff to do: ex. work, life, family (2)
- It is not explained well enough what we need to do. (2)
- Teachers go over the easy problems and assign the difficult ones to take home.
- Sometimes there's way too much reading assigned.
- I'm lazy.
- The textbook and assignments do not match very well. The answers or definitions are hard to find.
- For math some problems may be too difficult.
- It is done differently in the text than the way I understood a certain problem in class.
- There are other classes that also keep me very busy. I wait to get help for the assignment I don't really understand.
- I feel that the textbook is not meant for reading but meant as a reference.
- Too many assignments assigned to each chapter.
- I like handouts better. It is easier to get the main point.
- Sometimes it is difficult because it does not explain well, and in some cases the teacher teaches one way and the book another.
- There is no interaction between the author and the readers.
- The teachers give their own details that relate to the text but not enough to be on top of the text.
- Sometimes I did the assignments, but the teachers do not check the answers, so I decided to do it only if they tell me that they will check the book.
- There is too much to read.
- I complete it but lose it
- Sometimes the notes and handouts are sufficient. I'll go over a reading assignment to reinforce lecture.
- I already feel I understand the assignment through lecture and other classroom experience.

Question #7: I read using the following strategies:

- Read, take notes (in margins or separate paper) or highlight important information directly in textbook. (149)
- I scan the chapter, read chapter summary, read vocabulary, read text, key terms, study illustrations/tables. (28)
- I read it more than once (24)
- I compare reading with class notes/what teacher emphasized. (14)
- Outline important terms and information (9)
- Try looking at the index for definitions (3)
- To understand the subject and study what is needed (3)
- I read the text that the teacher has emphasized/reinforce with what teacher has covered (3)
- I make flash cards, and look up word I don't know or understand (3)
- get the main idea, context clues (2)
- I look at the questions/test at the end of the chapter, then go back to match the words to get the answers. (3)
- read, reread and take notes, sometimes I use 3 by 5 cards for vocabulary (3)
- look for highlighted or bolded words and look for things (words, ideas) that were mentioned in class (2)
- I compare the text to lecture notes (2)
- to analyze word by word while reading (2)
- memorize the pictures/diagrams/tables (2)
- read for no more than 15 minutes or to the end of a certain section and then review key terms (2)
- I read the main subject of the material and then supporting sentences of the subject. (2)
- I listen to music and I eat while I read. (2)
- I read the assignment first so that I know what to look for when I read. (2)
- I use a time limit, and read until that time is over
- muscle reading (2)
- Read it in context or make an outline about what I am reading. Take notes. Often stop and think about what I am reading. (2)
- look for more information, main ideas, supporting detail – to complete assignments first I read it, then I use dictionary for words I don't understand and reread it more than once again (2)
- I read what I can then return it before I have to pay the late fee to the library.
- I recognize the topic sentence, details, and conclusion.
- I scan for the particular part in reviewing or using for research
- I look for main ideas, asking myself why, when, how, where, what.
- I go to a quiet place, sometimes read aloud and take notes
- I read watching TV, that way I focus even more
- I make flash cards, I read in a silent place and I also love to read when riding the bus to work.
- read answers of study guides and all of important part

- I flip through pages, focus on image, and then go back to each section to read.
- I read everything, stopping and going over things I don't quite understand.
- look for key points, clues that help me out with the assignment that is due
- I read slowly and break it down.
- read definitions and look at pictures but don't really read it unless I really don't get it
- I first take a brief of the chapter and then read it, and resume it.
- read out loud
- Usually at the end of the chapter there are questions to answer and I review the questions and terms.
- I just read to answer the question or an assignment.
- I like writing in the book, my notes are a major part of my studying to understand my reading
- look for information regarding what we are studying in class; use exam guidelines and the course syllabus
- learning disability strategies
- content analysis, compare with lectures, skim detail
- to remember key points needing to know for class about the lecture
- just skim through
- Read summaries first then each paragraph of each section.
- Highlight key terms and discuss the book's context with my classmates.
- highlight dates, important people, and main points in different colors
- class notes and use the examples that have been worked out
- I take notes from my reading and frequently ask myself questions while answering
- homework questions
- I am usually looking for specific information to satisfy a question.
- skim through until I find the section/heading that interest me or will help to do my assignment
- I just go over the examples in the book so I can get an idea of what I have to do.
- I look for vocabulary words, similar signs, and I try the examples and look if the steps are the same
- I read the question then as I am reading I look for it.
- read instructions, scan, then do assignment
- I first read the things I don't understand first
- I review examples, I read new terms, I try to do the examples on my own
- taking notes, doing the example alone, test myself
- I make questions about the main topic and the main idea of the topic
- I read the most important passages
- First I read to familiarize myself with the text then I read for understanding
- outlining and doing sample problems and exercise problems in the text
- read title first to understand better about the topic
- try to make sense of the chapter and how it relates to the topic
- I read and then summarize the chapter

- I read the summary first, take my pretest, go back and read thoroughly, write notes in my notebook, reread, take posttest
- concept, purpose, clarification
- I summarize what I have read.
- I read along with the study guides given in the class so I can find the answers as I read
- I read vocabulary first, then read highlighted areas and boxes, reread using study guide, and read what is left.
- I read my textbook before going to class and to study for the test along with my notes from lecture
- I first read the summary of the chapter, then I read the part (section) that I feel that's important, then I read 1 more time when the teacher assigns it.
- I try to understand the key points of what the teacher has covered in class
- I read the summaries first. Then skim the chapter. Then thoroughly read and highlight.
- I read the title, the main ideas, focus some notes, highlight some important vocabularies and review them.
- Find main idea of the subject; try to remember examples.
- I read out loud I understand it better.
- First, I preview the book by looking at pictures, maps, brief comments, and then I start reading it
- I read table of context, read the study guide outline, read the textbook chapter while taking notes, then go back and read the study guide again and compare notes.
- I read the text, read the questions, reread, and answer the questions.
- Skim topics/subtopics then read it through.
- I read what's going to be on the test.
- read information that was unclear or too briefly explained by the instructor
- Ask and answer questions.
- I read starting at the beginning of each chapter, following examples and instructions.
- I look at all the examples and see the chapter reviews
- trying to understand, memorize, and preparing to be able to write it on a blank piece of paper
- concentrating and rereading the assignments twice
- highlight, use vocabulary in back and index
- anything printed in bold/go over the books notes (examples) vs. the notes I took in class
- read first those I am having difficulty with and so if I ran out of time I'll be ok
- use the handout
- I try to find out the main idea
- go through the chapters by understanding what the definitions is saying
- scan

Question #9: What was your primary reason for dropping a class?

- Too many classes/not enough time to study sufficiently. (105)
- The class was too difficult; I was doing poorly in it. (101)
- Dislike instructor/teaching methods (48)
- Personal/family problems. (36)
- Class interfered with work schedule. (35)
- I wasn't committed enough/didn't study enough/missed classes. (27)
- The class didn't fit my schedule. (7)
- I didn't have the textbook/textbook didn't help with the class (6)
- I didn't like the class. (5)
- Financial reasons. (3)
- I changed my major (3)
- The class was too easy. (2)
- I had transportation problems. (2)
- I had difficulty understanding the teacher. (2)
- I did not need the class. (2)
- I was placed into the wrong course level.
- No space in the course level I needed.
- I dropped it to go to the Fire Academy.
- I had military responsibilities.
- Class was too full and I had to sit on the floor.
- I took two science classes concurrently, but one should have preceded the other.
- My printed schedule had an error that caused me to miss first class; instructor dropped me.
- The text and lectures were different and most of the time textbooks info was not reflected in the exams
- I have a diagnosed learning disability with mathematics.
- Class meets once a week and instructor failed to lecture first 4 weeks of semester. It felt like a waste of time and money to drive here once a week for one class.
- class description was not accurate
- the class grade was impacted almost entirely by the final exam
- I tried to transfer to another class, but they wouldn't allow me
- too much homework/ no daycare available
- Didn't read, but I have the book and the test was mainly on the reading.

Question #10: Additional comments about textbooks or reading assignments.

- Textbooks are too expensive! (101)
- The textbooks are way too overpriced and many instructors rarely make assignments in them—it's a waste of our money. (43)
- Textbooks are boring/too long/ overwhelming. (9)
- Santa Ana College should give more for student textbook buybacks (6)
- Some of the textbooks have errors and wrong information. (4)
- Limit required books to 1 per class (4)
- Don't change edition every semester. (4)
- The textbooks that I have bought for the classes I'm taking go very well with the classroom instruction. (3)
- Although expensive, it is crucial for students to read the text and do the assignments. After all, it is college. (3)
- Research can be done on internet and review of class notes. (3)
- Teachers should spend more class time on textbook content. (2)
- Textbooks are useful, but please don't switch from one textbook into another one
- Semester after semester. (2)
- have fewer assignments/shorter assignments (2)
- They are too expensive, put them on CD or on the internet where it would be less expensive. (2)
- I actually enjoy the textbooks for the most part (2)
- Textbooks are too heavy.
- Most of the time the chapters are too extensive on certain topics.
- They are easy to understand.
- Not all classes have a course reserve.
- Sometimes textbooks are just bogus. They sometimes are hard to understand. In addition, sometimes it's just easier to buy a cheaper book at another store. I feel that the school buys books that look good, but the information in them isn't great
- I use the textbook to do assignments and would consider it useless otherwise
- Bookstore should give a full refund even though the book was still packaged.
- Assignments are awesome for those who are not good at taking tests.
- Lease books to students!
- Please have them available at the library. Textbooks should be replaced with monographs emphasizing lectures. Lectures along with the textbooks are redundant.
- Textbooks can be helpful in some ways but taking notes for me can be more important.
- I think the reading assignments are appropriate for students.
- Give specific question and have an answer from the reading.
- Textbook purchase should be optional, but handouts of important material made available.
- I think the textbooks are a very important material in our education.
- Textbooks help me a lot with visual aid and examples help me understand better.

- Make textbooks free to low income people.
- Textbooks are very good, but I would like to have less homework.
- Textbooks should be clearer and remember we have other classes to pass.
- I wish classes used more of a mix of lecture/textbook assignments.
- I think the teachers should read the book before making the students use them.
- Study guides for reading assignments should include the same material as the book.
- Most teachers do not go over the book. How is a student going to understand the textbook if the teacher does not really talk about, other than “Go and buy it, so that they take your money?” It is the teacher’s job to teach the student the standards, not to tell them to teach themselves. If that was the case then why go to school. The student should only pay for a book and not pay the school so that they pay teachers to do nothing.
- The math textbook should really specific when solving a word problem.
- Reading the text is sometimes not emphasized in the best ways. A different approach may help some students.
- Good supplement to the classroom.
- If I had more time to study, I would definitely try to read the textbook more.
- I typically buy the book in case of an assignment, but never read the text – I still have a 3.6 GPA
- The assignments gradually do improve, as long as I keep interested.
- I would rather learn through lectures.
- I believe textbooks are good elements to succeed in education without textbooks it would be difficult to succeed.
- I think textbooks are a good item for students because you always can refer to them in your house.
- I think professors should select textbooks that they themselves would actually understand.
- Although textbooks are expensive a creative determined student can do well without.
- Owning the books just makes life easier.
- The study guides at the end of the book to review.
- they should have some tutors to help decipher the text
- The textbook is very useful
- Fewer assignments should be given because many of us have to work plus other obligations at home.
- I think that most books should come with a study guide because they are of great help to the student.
- I think when we read the textbooks and take the test we find something totally different.
- They come with too many extra software/booklets we never use; not enough used books available.
- So far, I have no needs for the textbooks. The lecture notes are sufficient to pass the class with an A or B. This applies only if you go to class everyday.

- I don't think I use the textbook enough. Maybe handouts would work the same for me and it would be cheaper. The textbook only reinforces what the teacher has said, not interesting or new material.
- More reading assignments would be helpful in teaching because it would force people to read more.
- The teachers must check the assignments. This would motivate everybody to read the text assignment.
- The text should be provided by the school.
- The textbook for Math 140 serves no purpose because some classes give online HW and that makes it less valuable.
- Textbooks are good for references and are crucial when searching for further details.
- Most textbooks do not help you, the notes in class are the important ones and help you more with exams.
- I don't like online homework!!!
- Textbooks should get straight to the point.
- The textbooks and reading assignments help a lot when I use them
- Lectures are better than books! Based on what the teacher tells us, I learn faster by lectures rather than by reading it.
- The textbooks are good. The examples in the Math books have helped me understand a lot more to review for tests.
- The textbooks are just fine. I'm the one who needs to take care of them more seriously.
- The textbooks are rarely appreciated.
- SAC should offer low-cost used books
- It would be nice if the bookstore had a few extra copies available. I lost one and was unable to replace it. I had to order through Amazon. I wish (wish?) books were available earlier at the SAC Bookstore
- No, everything is cool. I like to pay for expensive books!