REFLECTION: KEY PROCESS FOR THE EFFICIENT READER AND LEARNER

An essential part of being an efficient reader and learner is being an efficient thinker. Certainly it is important to be able to recall memorized material for a test and to understand what you read, study, or hear in class. However, thinking on only these levels is not enough. You must also be able to respond in a variety of ways to whatever material you are studying so that your memory and learning are enhanced and so that you actually increase your knowledge base. Reflection, the final step in the Cornell Notetaking System and the SQ5R Study System (separate handouts are available for these), increases your reading and learning efficiency. Not only does it require that you understand the information you are learning, but it also demands that you question it, reorganize it, and deal with it on a level beyond factual recall.

Reflection is a difficult process because it asks you to really think about the content of lectures and/or textbook chapters. The questions listed below, which are tied to the level of thinking they promote, can be used to help you accomplish this final steppingstone to good learning. Also, the attached sample reflection should clarify how this learning strategy helps you think about your lecture and/or text notes and should give you some ideas about what types of statements might be found in a thoughtful response to the content you are studying.

One final note: reflection must be completed in writing. Just sitting and thinking about the information you are learning allows too many opportunities for your mind to wander. Capturing your thoughts in written form makes them concrete and real. Seeing your thoughts on a page helps you evaluate what you do and do not know. Putting your thoughts on paper makes you responsible for your own learning. Thus reflection really is the key to real knowledge.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE REFLECTION

1. **APPLICATION:** The ability to use learned material in new, concrete situations; also the ability to recognize when the rule applies.

Example: How can you use the math theory gained in this chapter? What can you learn about people in general from studying American History? For what will use your knowledge of a particular scientific theory or concept?
2. **ANALYSIS:** The ability to breakdown material into its different parts; also the ability to recognize relationships, underlying organization, and to connect ideas within a reading selection.

Example: How does this chapter relate to others that you have read? What was the author's organizational plan? How does he relate various subheadings in the chapter?

3. **SYNTHESIS:** The ability to put parts together to form a new whole; indicates a creative response.

Example: After studying the Civil War, what can you propose to help people get along better? What possible exam questions could be asked about this chapter? After reading this selection, what predictions can you make about life in the future?

4. **EVALUATION:** The ability to judge the value of material; all judgments must be based on either subjective or objective criteria.

Example: How important is this chapter for the upcoming test? Do you think that your behavior will change after reading this essay? What is the value of these math theories in your everyday life?
SAMPLE REFLECTIONS

Reading the notes I took on love in the Western world, I can easily see how important dates will be to explaining this fairly recent development. The writer uses dates to organize his writing and to give structure to the information. The dates also represent times of significant changes in the relationship between men and women. I think we will need to remember these dates for the exam and to help structure our essay answers.

What I think is really interesting about this information is the idea that families haven’t been around forever. People always criticize modern times because families are dissolving and aren’t very close-knit. They say we should be like old-fashioned families, close and unified. But reading this article, I now know that some of the problems we complain about today have been around for a long time. Men have always had a difficult time with romance, and men and women have never seen eye-to-eye on the issue. Sadly, too, women historically have been treated with contempt, except for the 11th century when knights wooed ladies from afar. Now I know where that knight-in-shining-armor myth came from! Anyway, I think the psychologists’ explanation for the rising divorce rate is helpful, and it supports my belief that too much emphasis is placed on romance. Besides, looking for what we don’t have in other people can lead to trouble in a marriage—the psychologists made that point and I agree. How can there be romance when each person is trying to fulfill himself or herself? Seems like selfishness to me.

I think a good test question over this material would be: Trace the development of romantic love from 5 B.C. to the present.