

Getting to Know Your Textbook

1. Examine the title page:

- Who are the authors?
- What is their standing in their fields? (Perhaps you can ask your professor.)
- Do their training and background qualify them to write a book of this type?
- Who are the publishers?
- When was this textbook published? What does that tell you about the book?

2. Examine the preface or introduction:

- Why is a preface written?
- What does it tell you about the book?
- Do the authors introduce any unusual features of your book in the preface and prepare you to be on the lookout for them?

3. Examine the table of contents:

- What does the table of contents tell?
- How is this textbook organized? What main divisions has it?
- Compare the table of contents with that of another book in the same field. Do the two books cover the same topics? Are these the topics you expected to find covered in this text?

4. Examine index, glossary, other material at the back of the book:

- How does the index differ from the table of contents? How does it resemble the table of contents?
- What sort of topics should be looked up in the index instead of the table of contents?
- What are cross references?
- Is there a glossary in your textbook? Can you use diacritical markings successfully to pronounce a word?
- Is there an appendix in your book? Why isn't this information included in the body of the book? How would it have affected the organization?
- What is the literal meaning of "index" according to the dictionary?

5. Examine study questions, guides, and other helps:

- Does the text provide study aids to help in understanding the text?
- Are the study aids in the form of questions, exercises, or activities?
- If questions are used, do they simply require finding the answers or must you do some critical problem-type thinking to arrive at answers?
- Are there study aids both preceding and following a chapter? Which types of aids help you most?
- Does the text provide suggestions for other readings or materials designed to help you understand this chapter?

6. Examine chapter headings, sectional headings, and margin guides:

- Look at the chapter heading and then the section headings that follow. Write them down and see if this gives an overview of the chapter.
- How do headings help in skimming a chapter for specific information?
- Do you find different kinds of type in your chapter? Does this help you understand the organization of your textbook better? How?
- Does the text provide help in identifying material to be found within each paragraph? Is the topic sentence indicated?
- Does the book use summaries? How do these help? What is the difference between giving the gist of a chapter and summarizing its contents?

7. Examine maps, pictures, charts, diagrams, and tables:

- Which of these visual aids is used? Do you understand them?