

# Using Textbooks - Teachers

## 1. Resource

A more comprehensive coverage of the information provided below is contained in the following resource:

**Visser, C.J.D. (2016)** A conceptual analysis of the quality and utilisation of school textbooks in classrooms and its relevance for teacher education (Unpublished doctoral thesis), Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg.  
**Chapter 4: Using Textbooks (147 – 192)**

## 2. Context

Teachers can use textbooks in a number of ways. How a textbook is used is dependent on the subject and grade level for which teaching is provided. The methods described here need to be adjusted for different subjects, grade levels and type of learners. Teachers are encouraged to use textbooks in a variety of ways to stimulate and maintain learner interest.

## USING TEXTBOOKS

### 1. Planning instruction – for lesson

planning and ensuring that the curriculum is appropriately covered

### 2. Construct assessment – when textbooks are the main learning resource assessment should be based mainly on its content

### 3. Provide an overview – provide an overview, up front, of the content to be covered over a period of time – refer table of content and preface

### 4. Review structure of textbook or chapter

Textbooks adopt a particular structure or format in terms of elements or characteristics – the value of a textbook can be enhanced when teachers explain the structure of the textbook to learners up front

#### Textbook structure

- Cover page
- Preface
- “How to use this textbook”
- Table of content
- Glossary of new/subject specific terms
- Assessment (example test and exam questions) plus answers
- Index

#### Chapter structure

- Learning objectives
- Topics
- Introduction to topics
- Content (definitions, explanations)
- Graphics (pictures, drawings)
- Examples
- Exercises and activities
- Assessment questions
- Discussion questions
- Summaries
- Key learning points
- Additional resources

**5. Review work already done** – before starting on a new topic or session review work already done – review summary or key learning points provided in textbooks

**6. Assign in-class activities from textbooks** – Most good textbooks contain a range of activities in the form of exercises, tasks, assignments and projects for learners to do, which they can do independently, in pairs, as groups or involving the whole class.

**7. Pre-instructional reading** – use as a means to prepare for a class; learners to be encouraged to ...

- a) Formulate a question on a topic they may want to ask the teacher
- b) Identify things they may already know
- c) Identify things that might be new to them (“I didn’t know that ...”)
- d) Identify things that they may want to know more about

**8. Setting homework** – from textbook

- a) Doing an exercise or solve a problem
- b) Reading up about something, preparing for the next session
- c) Making a summary of material covered
- d) Identifying questions or concerns from the material
- e) Studying content and prepare to answer questions
- f) Identifying different types of information contained in text, e.g. concepts, processes, procedures, principles, etc.

**9. Reading aloud from textbook** – allows teachers an opportunity to ...

- a) Provide context and emphasis
- b) Confirm relevance and importance
- c) Highlight specific sections
- d) Clarify terminology
- e) Assess understanding
- f) Ask questions
- g) Relate to content already covered
- h) improving reading skills

**10. Use as basis for discussions** – topics can be used to raise for a discussion, e.g.

- a) Exploring context
- b) Determining understanding
- c) Generating examples
- d) Explore advantages and disadvantages
- e) Do a “what if ...?”
- f) Consider alternative points of view

Use textbook to mediate differences of opinion put forward, or substantiate a point of view being put forward.

**11. Clarify concepts** – identify subject specific concepts; distinguish from other types of information; be able to define concepts (adopt common format for definitions)

**12. Find answers** – Use textbook as resource to look for or find answers; learners become actively and meaningfully involved with textbooks as a content resource

**13. Work backwards** – find evidence from a textbook that might support a given conclusion, e.g. In an Economics textbook the author may conclude that increasing the literacy and numeracy levels of a population will support the economic growth of a country, or that by stimulating economic growth will alleviate unemployment and poverty. Learners may then be required to find evidence from the textbook that might support those conclusions.

**14. Mind mapping** – A mind map or spider diagram is created around a single word or phrase, placed in the centre of the diagram, to which associated ideas, words and concepts are added. Teachers could get learners to draw a mind map on a particular topic prior to reading from a textbook; it gives them an opportunity to articulate what they already know about a topic. They could then go to the textbook and expand on or refine their mind map.

**15. Identify type of information** – identify and recognize different information types provided in textbooks. Different information types may require teachers to use a different approach in presenting learning content. For instance, much of the learning content presented to learners involves concepts, and introducing learners to new concepts. Learners need to be able to identify concepts, be able to define concepts and be able to distinguish a concept from other information types, e.g. procedures, or processes or facts.

**16. Teaching the page** – Teachers may draw attention to particular information that is provided on a particular page in a textbook, by using prodding questions, e.g. *What is that? Why is it there? How could you use it? What tells you...? Where can you see...? What catches your eye when you look at ...? etc.*

**17. Build subject specific vocabulary** – The textbook can be used to build subject-specific vocabulary by drawing learners’ attention to subject-specific words or terms used. In South Africa where more than 80% of learners are being educated through a medium of language that is not their home language the need to develop subject-specific vocabulary is important. Textbooks are an important resource to achieve this objective

# Using Textbooks - Learners

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**Chapter 4:** Using Textbooks (147 – 192)

## 2. Context

Learners can use textbooks to become more independent learners, develop reading and writing skills, clarify what they did not understand in class and to learn things they might not have been taught by their teachers. By using textbooks learning is extended into the home. Learners need to see and use textbooks every day in the class, and they must be put in a position where they can refer to textbooks throughout the year.

Learners can use textbooks in a number of ways when they work by themselves. The following examples of how learners can use textbooks are not exhaustive. Over time learners will develop textbook skills that will better fit their particular learning style.

## USING TEXTBOOKS

**1. How a textbook is structured** – Getting to understand the elements of a textbook, and how they can be used, will enhance the value of a textbook as an independent learning tool, also working from it at home. Elements that are characteristics of most textbooks and textbook chapters are listed.

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**2. Learn to use a textbook** – Textbooks are one of the most important learning resources available to learners. Learning to use textbooks effectively will help learners to get the most from their textbooks. Research supports the notion that learners who use their textbooks regularly perform better.

**3. Getting an overview** – The whole-part-whole learning principle suggests that learners will understand specific content better if they know how that content or topic fit into the broader scheme of things. Looking at the table of contents, reading chapter summaries, or key learning points, or just by paging through textbooks will help learners to gain an overview of the topics that will be covered in a subject, helping them to better establish meaning and context.

**4. Reading** – Using textbooks involves reading. Reading is a skill that is acquired from practice; the more learners read the better they get at it. Textbooks require that learners must be able to read-for-meaning; the more they use textbooks, as suggested here, the more meaning they will acquire. Learners use textbooks as a learning resource, to catch up on work or lessons they might have missed, or to prepare for lessons in advance, or to study for a test or exam.

**5. Reading ahead** – Learners develop an interest in a subject by reading about it and may be prompted to read ahead to prepare for lessons in advance. By reading ahead learners develop a subject frame of reference. Pre-reading activities is very important to help learners develop and activate background knowledge.

**6. Do homework** – Having access to textbooks at home allows learners to spend out-of-school time on additional reading, research, practice activities, and exercises presented in textbooks, using it to prepare for class and tests.

**7. Learning principle – time-on-task**  
Time-on-task is a learning principle that links learning with time. It is suggested that true learning depends on the amount of time a learner spends actively engaged in the learning process.

**8. Learning principle – repetition**  
Repetition is an important learning principles Learning requires practice, going over the same material or content many times. Every time a particular section is read, the level of understanding deepens contributing to significantly better learning performance.

**9. Prepare for class** – Being prepared will make class sessions more meaningful. Preparation will also help learners to become ‘ready to learn’. Moreover, preparing for class will give learners time to formulate questions to ask their teachers, aiding the overall learning process

**10. “What did I learn in class today?”** – It is part of the learning process for learners to reflect on new things they were exposed to, or the knowledge or skills they have gained. A textbook is always useful as a reminder of the things learners worked on at school on a particular day.

**11. Review work already done** – It is good practice for learners to regularly look again at the work in textbooks that was already covered. Reviewing work that has already been done help learners to ‘capture’ learning content in their minds; and in reviewing content already covered, the learning principle ‘repetition’ applies. It also helps learners to prepare for the assessment (tests and exams) that comes later.

**12. Develop subject-specific vocabulary**  
Every subject has its own vocabulary which distinguishes it from other subjects, e.g. Accountancy: assets, liabilities, income, expenditure, equity, shares, partnerships, cash flow, ledger, balance sheet, accounting cycle, etc.  
Learning a subject is all about mastering the language of the subject. Learners need to identify the subject-specific words, phrases, terminology, and concepts that distinguish that subject from other subjects. For this purpose the textbook is the most reliable resource to develop subject-specific language skills.

**13. Talk about it** – Learning becomes more meaningful when learners start talking about the content from textbooks; it will help them to understand topics and the language of subjects, and allow them an opportunity to practice using the subject-specific language of textbooks.

**14. Prepare to teach** – It is when learners explain something to someone else that they really know that they understand something. Learners should create opportunities where they explain things to each other; forming study groups can be very helpful. The textbook then becomes the main resource for learners to use in study groups and to explain things to each other.