We’re going to have a little fun while I illustrate the importance of activating prior knowledge before you read. I’m going to read a passage to you without activating your prior knowledge, and you are going to listen. Take notes as you listen, and try to answer the questions below.

Multiple Choice Questions

1. What is the first step in this process?
   a. Go somewhere else due to lack of facilities
   b. Arrange the materials into different groups
   c. Put the materials into their appropriate places

2. Why is it important not to overdo things?
   a. Complications can easily arise
   b. A mistake can be expensive
   c. Both A and B

3. At what point must the cycle be repeated?
   a. After the materials are arranged into different groups again
   b. After you go somewhere else due to lack of facilities
   c. After the materials are used once more

Short Answer Question

1. What process is being described in this passage?
Before Reading:

**ACTIVATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE, cont.**

*Why was it so much easier to understand the passage once you knew the title?*

It’s because the title gives you insight into what the passage is all about! In other words, the title gave you prior knowledge.

The prior knowledge you bring to reading is a combination of what you know, what you believe, and what you’ve experienced.

**What you know:** This includes your knowledge of the topic, of the area, of the main idea, and even what you know about reading and the type of writing you’re about to read.

**What you believe:** This includes your beliefs about yourself as a reader, and your motivation and desire to read.

**What you’ve experienced:** This includes your experiences that relate to the reading, or to details within the reading.

*Why is prior knowledge so important (and powerful) for readers?*

Prior knowledge is so powerful because the only way you learn new information is by connecting it to existing information. This point is so important that I’m going to do something I don’t often do: I’m going to repeat myself:

Learning happens when you connect new information to existing information.

This means that if you’d like to learn something new, you must connect the new information you’re taking in to existing information that you already have, aka: prior knowledge.
Before Reading:

**ACTIVATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE, cont.**

This is all nice to know, but let’s get down to brass tacks:

**How do readers activate their prior knowledge before reading?**

*Skilled readers answer these questions:*

- What do I know about this topic/style of writing/author?
- What experiences have I had that relate to this?
- What have I read before that relates to this reading?
- What do I think about this topic/style of writing/author?
- What personal experiences or ideas does this reading remind me of?

This seems like a lot of work—what benefits do readers get out of this?

This may seem like a lot of work at first, but remember—all of these skills become automatic for skilled readers. Just as skilled drivers automatically put the key in the ignition, fasten the seatbelt, adjust the rear view mirror, turn on the heat or a/c, and adjust the radio as soon as they get into the car; skilled readers go through a series of activities before they even begin reading. You will, too, once you’ve practiced these skills long enough. That’s a promise!

To answer the question, activating prior knowledge has many benefits for readers.

*Activating prior knowledge:*

- Increases comprehension
- Increases fluency (so you can read faster with more accuracy)
- Makes the reading personally relevant, and therefore, it also:
  - Increases motivation to read (you’re more motivated to read something if you can personally relate to it. We’ll talk more about this, later on.)
In other words, **activating prior knowledge saves time and frustration**. Just as nobody wants to bother running on a treadmill if they aren’t going to burn calories, nobody wants to read if they aren’t going to understand and remember what they read. Activating prior knowledge is one step toward ensuring that readers benefit from the time they spend reading.

*By the way—all of the strategies we are going to discuss this semester have similar benefits to activating prior knowledge. Remember that!*  

*Actions speak louder than words:*

**Just Do It: What do readers look like while Activating Prior Knowledge?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readers probably look like they’re just sitting around and wasting time when they’re activating prior knowledge.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some might squint their eyes and hold their chin in one hand and look serious and pensive. Others might have their mouths hanging open and their eyes staring off into space. But in their heads, they’re all thinking.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And that, my friends, is the key.

*Use this space to take notes about this skill. Remember to do some self-reflection—is this a skill you have already developed? If not, consider writing down some specific goals for practicing this skill. When and how do you plan to apply it? When do you hope to master this skill?*
Before Reading:

**SET A PURPOSE**

**Why is setting a purpose so important (and powerful) for readers?**

Setting a purpose helps you focus only on what is important, and therefore it helps you avoid information overload. Reading without a purpose can lead to confusion, frustration, and other negative things that are likely to discourage you from reading.

In addition, setting a purpose:
- Encourages you to read *actively*
- Helps you activate your *background knowledge* (which, as you already know, is an extremely important skill)
- Helps you *self-assess* whether you are comprehending the reading
- Makes it easier to *locate the information* that is important to you (and ignore the information that isn’t!)

*This is all nice to know, but let’s get down to brass tacks:*

**How do readers set a purpose for themselves before reading?**

*First, consider whether your professor has a specific purpose in mind for the reading.*

- How has she expected you to apply the information from readings in the past—to support a class discussion? To answer specific questions? To take a quiz or test? To engage in an activity, such as a lab or group project?
- *If* you know how your professor plans to use the reading in class, keep this in mind when you consider the next step, and set a purpose that will help you in class.

*Second, set a purpose for reading. Here are some examples:*

- Ask questions
- Create discussion questions
- Make connections
- Make predictions
- Agree or disagree
- Identify the main idea
- Make an inference
- Retell
- Visualize a picture
- Identify author bias

*Third, set clear and measurable goals:*

- How many annotations do you plan to make?
- How much do you plan to read ~or~ for how long do you plan to read?

  e.g. “I will create four discussion questions in the next 20 minutes.”
  or
  “I will make two connections and two predictions in the next 15 pages.”
SET A PURPOSE, CONTINUED

Actions speak louder than words:

Just Do It: What do readers look like while Setting a Purpose?

Readers who are setting a purpose for their reading will be jotting down some notes in the margins of their text, or in their notebook to help them remember their purpose.

They may also be talking to classmates or the professor to get some more information about what their purpose should be. Smart students do this when they aren't exactly sure about their purpose for reading, and they don't want to waste any time reading for the wrong purpose, so they get the information up front.

Use this space to take notes about this skill. Remember to do some self-reflection—is this a skill you have already developed? If not, consider writing down some specific goals for practicing this skill. When and how do you plan to apply it? When do you hope to master this skill?