WHEN your textbook is a struggle

When a textbook is unclear and your comprehension is lousy and your rate is slow and you're getting frustrated, try these suggestions:

1. **Look for essential words** If you're stuck on a paragraph, mentally cross out all the adjectives, prepositional phrases, and adverbs, and read the sentence without them. Concentrate on the significant words, usually verbs and nouns.

2. **Read it aloud** Even though this slows you down to the rate of speech, it's alive and active. Read a passage aloud several times, each time using a different inflection, emphasizing a different part of the sentence. Be loud and animated. Imagine that you are

3. **Read it again, later** This is not always a waste of time, especially with the highly technical writing found in the sciences. If you read an assignment and are completely lost, don't despair. After reading, leave it alone. Sleep on it. Your mind will work on those concepts while you slack off. When you return to the assignment, you should see it with fresh eyes.

4. **Use an alternate text** Read another book?! Well, sometimes the same concept can be understood better if you find it expressed another way. Maybe a GRE or SAT prep book in the subject would condense or explain better. Even children's books, especially children's encyclopedias, provide useful overviews of baffling subjects.

5. **Hold a mini-review** Stop at the end of each paragraph, section or page and recite - in your own words - what you have read. Or write a short summary, possibly in the margin of the text.

6. **Try to explain or teach it** We often understand more than we think we do. To get in touch with this ability, pretend it's clear as a bell and explain it to yourself, your study group or some other victim. Write out your explanation as a potential essay question.

7. **Stand up!** Changing positions periodically can combat fatigue. Try standing when you read, especially if you get stuck on a tough passage and decide to read it aloud. Sometimes hearing the words makes them more understandable, and pacing back and forth can help to focus concentration. For some people, getting up on their feet works wonders.

8. **Use your instructor** Admit when you're absolutely stuck and make an appointment with your instructor. Most teachers welcome the opportunity to work individually with students, which is why they have office hours. Be very specific about your confusion. Point out the paragraphs that you found toughest to understand.

9. **Find a tutor** CUA peer tutors are students who were in your position not long ago and might even have had your professor and/or your text. Tutors can give you a first-hand approach to a course and look at your situation from a student perspective.