

SECTION 9: Map Reading Strategies

By now you should have an understanding of the basic map elements and be ready to begin map reading.

Maps, like books, should be read systematically. This will take practice on your part but if you adopt the following general steps the task will be made easier:

1. Undertake a preliminary scan of the whole map area.
2. Locate and read the marginal information (such as the title, scale and legend).
3. Then read the map content.

SCANNING

It is very important that you do a preliminary scan of the entire map area before attempting to read the map content in any detail. It should be done slowly and systematically so as to provide you with a complete mental picture of the general layout of the map and its contents.

For braille readers, the most efficient method of scanning is to use both hands simultaneously to move in vertical strips down the map. If you use three fingers on each hand, thus giving a six-finger wide perceptual window, the whole map can be covered in relatively few scans. The use of six fingers also helps in recognising linear features and their orientation. Because you are accustomed to reading braille, it may take a little while to get used to vertical scanning, but with practice it will become easy.

For bold print readers, scanning by eye is an effective means of covering the map. You can scan in strips up and down or across the map. The width of each scan will depend on your area of vision. Another, less systematic form of scanning is to trace in turn the major features like the coastline, rivers, roads, railways, etc.

You may find it necessary to repeat to gain a mental picture of the whole

MARGINAL INFORMATION

The first pieces of map information the map margin. You will of course preliminary scan. They are:

- map title
- map scale
- map legend

and should be read in this sequence

Map Title

A map title is a concise statement and often consists of two parts:

- A primary title that identifies the map
- A secondary title that states the content

For example, a map titled 'Sydney: map covers the whole of metropolitan being local government areas (bound 'Civic Centre: Sheet 1 of 3 Sheets' cover the whole of Civic Centre. Other are more self-explanatory and give s

You may find it necessary to repeat the scan several times before you are able to gain a mental picture of the whole map.

MARGINAL INFORMATION

The first pieces of map information which should be read are usually found in the map margin. You will of course have already located them during the preliminary scan. They are:

- map title
- map scale
- map legend

and should be read in this sequence.

Map Title

A map title is a concise statement about the intended purpose of the map. It often consists of two parts:

- A primary title that identifies the mapped area
- A secondary title that states the contents of the map

For example, a map titled 'Sydney: Local Government Areas' tells you that the map covers the whole of metropolitan Sydney with the main feature mapped being local government areas (boundaries and names). Similarly, a map titled 'Civic Centre: Sheet 1 of 3 Sheets' tells you that three maps are needed to cover the whole of Civic Centre. Other titles like 'Australia: Population Density' are more self-explanatory and give specific information.

Map Scale

As you already know, map scale is the ratio between a distance on the map and the corresponding distance between the same two points on the ground. Section 2 explains map scale in some detail.

The scale is included in the marginal information on the face of the map except where the map is one of a series, in which case the scale will often be shown on a separate legend sheet—see below under 'Map Legend'.

Map Legend

As we discussed previously a map legend consists of a list of the symbols used on a map together with simple statements explaining what each symbol represents.

On most maps, like those found in thematic atlases and topographic map series, a separate legend will appear on the face of each map. However, where a braille map is one of a series using a standard set of symbols, a separate single legend sheet is likely to be provided for all maps in the series.

Locating the legend and familiarisation with the symbols used on the map are essential before you can successfully read the map content.

Other Marginal Information

Amongst the marginal information you may also find additional notes relating to map content. To conserve space, for example, braille or bold print feature names may be replaced on the map with letters or numbers and in such cases a list which identifies the abbreviations will appear in the margin or on a separate sheet.

Now that you have a mental image something about its content and the can begin a more detailed study of

MAP CONTENT

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- Maps which depict point data, for mineral deposits, etc. may best be individual locations to State border
- Maps which depict data such as explored by tracing the length of borders and/or the coastline.
- Area data such as soil types and category by category, again using known features.

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Now that you have a mental image of the general layout of the map and know something about its content and the way in which the data are represented, you can begin a more detailed study of the map content.

MAP CONTENT

Perception of a whole map can only be achieved by exploring small parts of the map and fitting them all together into a coherent whole.

The following hints will be helpful when you are reading map content:

- Maps which depict point data, for example maps portraying urban centres, mineral deposits, etc. may best be explored State by State by relating individual locations to State borders and/or the coastline.
- Maps which depict data such as roads or railways by lines may best be explored by tracing the length of individual features and relating them to State borders and/or the coastline.
- Area data such as soil types and rainfall distribution may best be explored category by category, again using the familiar shapes of the coast and other known features.

As map detail comes in many forms, different maps are often suited to different reading strategies. The exercises in the next section include examples of strategies suited to different types of maps and will give you the opportunity to use many of the skills you have learnt in the previous sections.