

# How to Read an Academic Book or Article

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These are bits of wisdom I wish someone had told me when I started grad school. Reading an academic article/book is *not* like reading a newspaper or novel. Following these guidelines will help keep you from being overwhelmed, and make you better prepared for discussions and essays.

## 1. Read actively, not passively.

You read because you are trying to **mine the text** for insights. You are *not* reading because you have to get through it. Take an **active posture** while reading: you are trying to take something away from the reading.

## 2. Before you begin, ask yourself: what is my purpose for reading this?

First ask yourself: What topic is the course covering this week? What are the active issues and recurrent themes? What sorts of insights do I hope to get out of the reading? The Reading Questions will help you get a grip.

## 3. Do *not* always read from start to finish.

Read the introduction or opening paragraphs. Then skip to the back and read the conclusion to see where the thing is going. Flip through the article/book and take note of the section or chapter titles. Read the beginning & end of each section to see what they're about.

**Stop. Think** about what this article/book is trying to accomplish and how it will get there. **Get a sense** of the overall arguments first, and how the author will develop them.

Then step back, close your eyes and think, what are the most important parts that I must read? What can I skim over for now?

## 4. Read selectively.

Do not read every word in the text. Read the most important parts first, and see what else you need to read as you go. You can always go back. You have my permission to skip the less important parts – no guilt, really!! But you got to be thoughtful to figure what those are.

<p>*** <i>Better to read the most important parts thoughtfully, than try to get through the entire thing like a zombie.</i> ***</p>
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## 5. Stop frequently and ask yourself: what did I just learn?

Make notes as you go. Write down questions. Don't get bogged down in unimportant detail. If your mind starts to wander, stop and refocus on the big picture: what's been happening in the text, and where is it going?