



The Reading Center

How to Read for History

Reading requires writing!

Just reading the words doesn't work--systematically take notes and **review them!** Take notes on your thoughts and the author's arguments or main points.

Why are you reading?

Yes, you're reading because they assigned it--but what will you do with the information? Reading for an exam or for research or class discussion require different strategies.

Examine prior knowledge

What do you already know about this subject? More importantly, what do you **want** to know about this topic? Make a list of questions before you start!

It's not a marathon

If you are reading critically or for understanding, chunking can be helpful. Instead of reading for long stretches, break up your text into smaller chunks. (It makes it easier to remember and focus!)

Be engaged

You're unlikely to remember important details or understand complex concepts by just staring at a page. Engage with the text! Highlight important passages, take notes in the margin, etc.

Know your timeline

It is critical to keep dates and timelines in order when reading for history, as well as knowing the broader historical context. Take a moment to "situate" yourself in the period you are reading.

Use a strategy

You wouldn't go to war without a strategy--don't read without one! Check [The Reading Center's website](#) for common reading strategies and tips to help you be a better reader.

Check for understanding

Check-in with yourself regularly--do you understand what you're reading? If not, re-read, look things up, and try to make sense before you move on.

Summarize

Write a brief summary of chapters, sections, or the entire text to help jog your memory. Include main points and key information for ease of studying!





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Other Resources

Here are some other helpful resources about reading and engaging with History texts:

- [How to Read for History by W. Caleb McDaniel](#)
- [How to Read a History Book by Zachary Schrag](#)
- [Some Suggestions on Critically Evaluating Your Reading in History from Carleton College](#)
- [How to Read Historical Writing from Valdosta State Univeristy](#)
- [How to Read for a College History Course by Heather Cox Richardson](#)

