

How to Read a History Book:

"Books are made of words, but not all words have equal weight. Understanding the hierarchy of words may allow you to extract 75 percent of a book's content while reading only 25 percent of the text."

Important Elements of a Book:

1. **Title:** "A well chosen title will suggest not only the subject matter of the book, but also its central argument".
2. **Chapters:** "Introduction and conclusion often most important".
3. **Sentences:** "The topic sentences have the same function as headlines in a newspaper".
4. **Visual Aids (maps, photos):** Included for a reason.

"A good book will contain dozens of topic sentences that will provoke you to read the whole paragraph. In other words, read quickly through the parts you believe; read slowly through the arguments of which you are not convinced."

Ask Questions: "...You haven't really read a book until you decide what you think. As you read, you should constantly ask questions."

Ex:

- What is the author's argument, and am I persuaded? If so, what evidence is particularly persuasive?
- What does the author care about?
- What are some of the key terms she uses again and again?
- Why did my professor assign this book?
- How does it fit into the course?

Take Notes: "To get your best ideas...you must take notes while you read."

- Imagine that you are talking to the author
- When they say something interesting, talk back or ask a question—and write your response in the margin
- Summarize notes with questions

How To Read in College:

"You have to make strategic decisions about what to read and how to read it. You're reading for particular reasons: to get background on important issues, to illuminate some of the central issues in a single session of one course, to raise questions for discussion."

Introduction- Skimming For Arguments:

"A good skimmer has a systematic technique for finding the most information in the least amount of time."

How Do You Know What to Ignore and When to Ignore it?

1. **Experience**- When done enough times, you'll know what you don't have time to deal with.
2. **Context**- Making a sidepoint, exploring on topic.
3. **Objective**- Why are you reading this: what is the subject of the course, the focus of the discussion?
4. **Signposts**- Concepts/definitions, "I will argue...", "I propose...", "My point of departure..."

In The Middle- Sequence Of Arguments:

"You don't have all day to waste on the intro. You've got to get a sense of the whole book, get to the middle of it. Here's some steps to help you skim your way into the heart of things."

1. **Chapter Titles**- Pay attention to their sequence.
2. **Introduction**- Read chapter introductions.
3. **Key Arguments**- Look for key arguments, and relate back to introduction and conclusion.
4. **Evidence**- How does the author support their argument, and in what sequence?

Think About Sequence and What Difference it Makes:

"To develop an argument well, each point should lead logically and sequentially to the next...Outlining the sequence of arguments in readings should help you grasp this—assuming the reading is well-written."

When To Go For The Dictionary, When To Puzzle Over Words Or References:

Footnotes:

There are five different basic kinds of footnotes:

1. When scholars are acknowledging each other's work.
2. Interesting stuff that distracts from the main point.
3. Problems with the writer's argument.
4. Relevant books of theory on a particular subject.
5. The source of a factual assertion.

Dictionary:

"If a term recurs regularly in a text, or seems particularly central, you **MUST** learn to pick up a dictionary and find out what the author means. Learn to keep one by your side and don't try to bluff your way past such a term."

"An initial mistake about the meaning of a term can rapidly multiply into a gigantic misreading if you're not careful."

Taking Notes And Preparing For Discussion:

1. **Highlighting-** Be sure to not mark up everything you read.
2. **Outline-** Write key arguments and their sequence.
3. **Areas of Uncertainty-** Mark things you don't understand.
4. **Critique-** Mark two or three areas of potential disagreement or debate.

Common Signposts:

Category	Signposts	Why it Matters
Causal Questions	"accounts for", "causes", "explains." Also watch out for clumps of questions, especially those that start with "Why" or "How."	This stuff will tell you what the main question of the article is, or help you figure out what the question you've already identified actually means.
Summary/Restatement	"In other words", "That is", "In short", "In brief", "This book/chapter/article addresses", "I focus on"	This stuff is gold. Often a single paragraph will tell you "in short" or "in brief" what the whole argument is. Often an article will do this several times! How helpful!
Conclusions	"conclude(s)", "draws the conclusion", "thus", "therefore", "I/we determine"	Closely related to summaries and restatements, though not quite overlapping, these signposts often indicate a main finding or the resolution to a debate.
Assumptions	"assume", "assumption", "taken for granted", "expectation", "based on", "supposed"	Can identify either the author's own assumptions or the assumptions of others. Often incredibly important in an assessment of the overall argument.
Lit Review/Counterarguments	"some scholars", "some analysts", "others", "critics", "may object"	These phrases help identify two things: the background or context of the article, including debates it addresses, and possible counterarguments to the article -- often counterarguments and background are the same thing.
Lists and Emphasis	Any time you see "First", "second", "third", etc., or any time text is presented in <i>italics</i> , boldface , with <u>underlines</u> , pay attention.	If it's a list, make sure you know what it's a list OF. If it's emphasized, figure out why.