

### How to Read Historical Writing

Reading history is **very different** from reading fiction. The purpose of reading a **textbook** is to develop a coherent overview of a particular topic. The purpose of reading a **historical monograph or an article**

parts before trying to tackle the concept as a whole. If you are required to remember various details like names, dates, or specific vocabulary, make flash cards and quiz yourself until you can remember the information without looking it up. When you study specific details, look for the significance of how they relate to the general themes and contexts in the material. If you are required to take a map test, trace a blank map, then practice filling it in with locations mentioned in class or in your book. Study until you are able understand content from memory without looking at notes.

**Always:**

Make a note, including the page number, of anything that you do not understand, and ask your professor to explain it.

Write your outlines and summaries. Do not trust your memory and a highlighter alone.

Review the notes over what you read within 24 hours of reading it, or you will forget what you read.

Take a break every half hour or so. Do not try to ingest large amounts of information in a single sitting.

Remember that even professors get confused by difficult concepts and have to re-read material. Re-read difficult passages until you can understand them, or decide to ask for help.

Remember that reading history is often an abstract and intellectual endeavor. Do not expect that you will understand everything. You usually have to work to grasp ideas.

Why do college professors seem so smart? Because we take **organized notes** when we read to prepare for classes, we look up words that we don't know, we ask our colleagues for help when we need it, and **we review material constantly**. *Follow these steps and you can be as smart as a college professor!*